

THE ROLE OF WHITE CLERGY IN WHITE POWER, PRIVILEGE,
AND SUPREMACY IN THE MISSOURI MID-SOUTH
CONFERENCE UCC

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A FINAL DOCUMENT SUBMITTED TO
THE DOCTORAL STUDIES COMMITTEE
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

UNITED THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
DAYTON, OHIO
May, 2004

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ABSTRACT

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By

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My objective was to study the role of white power, privilege, and supremacy in the white clergy of the Missouri Mid-South Conference of the United Church of Christ. A survey, interviews, and printed materials from the clergy were examined in order to determine awareness of and complicity with white power. Data suggested a level of complicity commensurate with the white culture as a whole. I conclude that white clergy in this conference are not immune from white power dynamics, and that this is inconsistent with their own perceptions of who they are and want to be.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work owes itself to the contributions of too many folk to be named or counted, and so I will acknowledge only those who have had the deepest and most profound impact on me.

I begin with my mentor, the Rev. Dr. Sam Mann. My relationship with Sam dates back almost 15 years now. We recognized in each other from our first encounter kindred spirits, and from that time forward he has done more to shape my ministry than anyone else. This doctoral studies program will long be counted as one of the most rewarding experiences of my life, if for no other reason than that it put me at the feet of one my masters for extended periods of time. I covet this time with Sam, and I continue to learn from him. Whether through his preaching, his teaching, his admonitions, his loving correctives, long drives with him, scotch-sipping on his front porch, story-telling in restaurants, or just sitting in conversation with him into the late hours with colleagues around a bar table I have come to be shaped by every encounter with him. I am far the better for this.

I continue with my brother and fellow-traveler on this most curious of journeys, the Rev. John Paddock of Christ Episcopal Church in Dayton, Ohio. We met as first time students in this program almost three years ago. I find his quiet and thorough probing of all matters, his gentility and wry grin, his profound insight and soul-searching self awareness to have been great and lasting gifts that I will long treasure. There were times when neither one of us ever thought we would actually complete this work, but through mutual care and

work, but through mutual care and continual prodding, we have done it. It is of great and profound satisfaction to me that we both began and now end this work together.

And finally, I acknowledge my debt to Dr. Larry Welborn. His critical insight into all matters has proven crucial. His ability to make you feel affirmed even while making important corrections has been a constant source of encouragement. His biblical interpretive skills have proven themselves to be both unsurpassed and thoroughly indispensable.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated both to the memory of my hero, Jackie Robinson, and to my family: Mimi, whose constant love, support, and encouragement made this work possible; and John, Adam, and Molly, for whom I dream of better days and offer this work as hope for making them possible.

INTRODUCTION

The author was about sixteen years old when he got a job working summers at a large cemetery in St. Louis. It was either the largest or second largest cemetery in Missouri, and it would take a crew of about eight, each working from 7:30 am till about 4:30 pm, about six weeks to cut and trim the grass around all the graves. It was incredibly boring work, but it put money in his pocket. He got the job because his father worked in the front office, and had for about fifteen years or more.

One of the things he did to help pass the time was read the stones and graves as he cut around them: one never knew what one would find. Usually, the typical name and date was offered. He was usually just curious to see how long someone might have lived, or perhaps how long ago. Once in a great while, he would come across something that seemed interesting.

One afternoon, after hours of running the weed eater, the author came across a stone in one of the more remote and unkempt areas of the cemetery. As the grass was cleared from around the worn out edges of a very small, hidden, and almost indiscernible stone, he read the name on the grave and almost dropped the weed-eater in disbelief. There at his feet lay the buried body of Dred Scott. There was nothing anywhere in the cemetery that marked this gravesite of one of Missouri's most historical figures.

As one drove into the cemetery, one of the very first things one encountered was the towering grave of General William Tecumseh Sherman. A large monument,

surrounded by two large and well sculpted shrubs, two other large sculptures, an American flag, signs pointing to the site where he was buried, and granite stones in which were carved interesting tidbits about his life all adorned this burial location. It was the first landmark one encountered when entering the cemetery. When you stopped into the office, they pointed the site out to visitors.

The author's dad had worked at this cemetery for about fifteen years. He had been through the cemetery and in the front office countless times; had worked at the cemetery for months; and knew by that time where the various sections were (the Italian section, the Polish section, the baby section, the section where the bodies were buried during the Plague that swept through the city); knew where Dr. Tom Dooley's grave was; knew where the priests and nuns were buried. No one had ever mentioned to him that Dred Scott was buried there. Had someone else been cutting that section that day, he does not think that he would know even to this day how close he had been all that time to the body of this great man.

One will certainly want to ask as they read through this thesis what motivations the author might have, and from where the passion for this work comes. Moments like these haunt his memory banks. They speak a profound truth about to him about family, history, culture, and church. This single incident stands far from alone. There are many like it: moments that struck him then and now as lessons about what it meant to be white and what it meant to be black in this land. Accompanying every one of them has been a call both to take notice, and to work to the best of his ability to make a difference, to bring about lasting and meaningful change.

Throughout the course of his studies on the subject of Reframing the Dialogue on Racism, he has learned to examine the role that white privilege, white power, and white supremacy have played in shaping the culture in which he lives and moves and has his being. This is a culture that has shaped his identity. It invests a lot of time, effort, and energy maintaining what George Lipshitz names its *Possessive Investment in Whiteness*.¹ The author has come-through much soul-searching, thorough research, extensive reading, insightful mentoring—to understand that as a white male in this culture, he is afforded privilege and power that other races, especially the black race, are not afforded.

This study has not taken place in a vacuum. This a person of faith who is also shaped by profound theological and biblical truths. Part of this soul-searching has included an analysis of the ways in which even these profound truths have been compromised in this culture by what Shawn Kelley calls our “racialized discourse.”² Even given this reality, however, he is aware (and has been for a long time) that he is part of a culture and a church that professes as a matter of faith deeper truths that cannot be reconciled with the way lives have come to be shaped. Any effort to take seriously these truths will lead to both a thorough examination of the foundations upon which this culture has been built and, in the end as well, a prophetic call and concerted effort toward radical transformation.

Having said that, such radical transformation-while it may be that to which the author’s life and ministry are directed—is not the purpose and focus of this study. In an

¹ George Lipshitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia, PA: Temple Univesity Press, 1998).

² Shawn Kelley, *Racializing Jesus: Race, Ideology and the Formation of Modern Biblical Scholarship*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2001), 5.

effort to lend credence to what others have experienced, to what others have written, and to what others are teaching about America's possessive investment in whiteness, the focus here will be on a very small segment of that culture: white clergy of the Missouri Mid-South Conference of the United Church of Christ. With them questions are raised about complicity with the evil of racism in America. The goal is to discover the extent to which this particular segment of the American culture can be isolated and identified as perpetrators of this injustice; and to discover as well the extent to which they may or may not be aware of such complicity.

In the work that follows, the context in which this study has taken place will be identified. The white clergy of this conference have a particular history and identity that must be examined as background to the work that will follow. Missouri itself has its own story to tell relative to issues of white power, privilege, and supremacy. A piece of that will include the story of Dred Scott.

Any conclusions gleaned from this study and from the analysis of the data it uncovers will be shaped in profound ways by the context in which the study itself takes place. Full disclosure at the outset is a critical step in the process, and will help determine the extent to which the conclusions drawn can be applied in more universal settings.

Such disclosure cannot end, however, with contextual revelations about those on whom the study is being conducted. The results of this work will be shaped by other voices, ones to whom throughout the course of these doctoral studies the author has given much time and attention. Their writings, their words, and their teachings have had a profound impact on him. Among them are biblical scholars, theologians, socialists, historians, politicians, poets, and authors. While he can in no way be comprehensive in

disclosing the extent to which they have influenced the outcome of his efforts, nor even in listing the names and works that have shaped him in this process, he will make the attempt to name those who have had the deepest affect and influence on him.

After a lengthy study of the culture and context in which the author lives, and the decision to narrow the focus on a particular group of individuals within that culture, the daunting question about how to test the hypothesis was faced. After much discussion with peers and mentors, a process was developed that could bring him closer to uncovering some hidden truths. My goal from the outset was not to develop a program that could be used in another church setting, but to create a methodology that could be deployed both to reveal the extent to which a segment of the population was participating in a system of white power, privilege, and supremacy and to reveal the extent to which they might have been aware of that participation.

Because the means and methods used to collect this data and information can have an affect on the outcome, the tools used to gather all of the information that were acquired must be disclosed and described. Before entering into any discussion about the results of this study and analysis of the data collected, time will be taken to outline the method developed. The author will disclose, with much attention to detail, the exact process used to complete this study.

What has just been described here will serve as the early of this work, and will comprise its first four chapters. Chapter 1 will address the definitions of white power, privilege, and supremacy: the background against which this whole piece is revealed. Chapter 2 will describe the methodology of the study. Chapter 3 will address the matter of context—both in terms of the specific location in which the study is conducted, and in

terms of the specific community with whom the work was done. Chapter 4 will reveal the major influences that have helped shaped the author's understandings of white power, privilege, and supremacy.

All of this, while incredibly important and certainly integral to the work, serves as prelude to the rest of the thesis: a thorough examination and analysis of the data collected. Chapters 5, 6, and 7 will treat each segment of the study separately. In chapter 5 the results of the Survey will be analyzed. Chapter 6 will examine results of the Interviews that were conducted. And Chapter 7 will uncover what was revealed in the rather detailed and thorough poring over of the Newsletters that were collected. Chapter 8, then, will serve as the culmination of this entire study. This chapter will speak about what conclusions can be drawn from the collection of data obtained in the study.

The author is grateful for this opportunity. This challenge has led him down a path that, in ways, is not of his own choosing. It has forced him to confront realities that, had they remained hidden, would have made his life and my ministry much more comfortable.

But he is not, and will not be, and can no longer ever again be, content with comfort. There is alive and well in our world a profound racial injustice that has been fed by his own complicity, and that has in turn fed his own complacency. To be complacent and complicitous is no longer an option for him. One who is white in this culture is a racist, and will remain so until two things occur.

First, one must confront ones own racism in very active and transformative ways. Even if one is able to complete such a transformation after a lifetime of work, effort, and energy, one cannot claim to be beyond the pale and spoil of the moniker racist. Second,

one must also—by a means which remains to us yet so elusive — commit to and accomplish the radical transformation of a culture polluted by its own deeply beloved possessive investment in whiteness.

The author dreams about a day when these grand ideals become so much a part of life and culture that we look with awe, wonder, and a healthy dose of shame at what has been allowed to exist for far too long. But until that time comes, he remains committed both to his own personal transformation, and to the utter destruction of a culture whose racialized discourse and possessive investment in whiteness have tainted it beyond hope of redemption. Which is not to say that we are without hope here: our hope lies not in the actual transformation or reformation of this culture, but in the new life that will come from the birth of another one that will take its place.

CHAPTER ONE

DEFINITIONS

The author lives now with the presumption that it is not possible to be white in this culture and not be racist. This statement is not meant to inflame, but to inform. A thorough historical analysis of white America reveals that from the outset our wealth and power were won at the expense of, through the collective and enforced labor of, through the life and blood of, and with blatant disregard for the black race. Perhaps no one speaks this truth more powerfully than Randall Robinson in his book “The Debt.” In that book he writes:

No race, no ethnic or religious group, has suffered so much over so long a span as blacks have, and do still, at the hands of those who benefited, with the connivance of the United States government, from slavery and the century of legalized American racial hostility that followed it. It is a miracle that the victims—wary dark souls long shorn of a venerable and ancient identity—have survived at all, stymied as they are by the blocked roads to economic equality.¹

Modern scholarship speaks quite routinely now about the phenomenon of white power, white supremacy, and white privilege. The author accepts it as a given. In this chapter he will define these terms and defend that opening statement: one cannot be white in America today and not be racist.

¹ Randall Robinson, *The Debt: What America Owes to Blacks* (New York, NY: Penguin Putnam Inc., 2000), 8.

This phenomenon of white power, privilege, and supremacy will serve as the backdrop to what will follow: an examination of a small segment of this white population and their possessive investment in whiteness. It must be said from the outset that the purpose here is to, in one way, advance the field of study and to lend credence and credibility to insights already gleaned by others. But in another way, the purpose is more personal: it serves as a part of the author's struggle to work through his own complicity with racism.

George Lipshitz writes:

I contend that the artificial construction of whiteness almost always comes to possess white people themselves unless they develop antiracist identities, unless they disinvest and divest themselves of their investment in white supremacy. . . . There is an element of choice in all of this. White people always have the option of becoming antiracist, although not enough have done so.²

The author truly wishes to do so.

Furthermore, it is hoped that the consciousness is raised to the white colleagues in ministry (with whom this study is being conducted) regarding their personal complicity; and that having done so, they too will pursue an active, aggressive campaign to divest themselves of white power and privilege, to preach often about the perniciousness of white supremacy, and to seek an end to racial injustice in their church, among their white communities, and in America. In her book *Dismantling Privilege*, Mary Elizabeth Hobgood writes: "In order to maintain benefits not accessible to others, we value innocence in the forms of ignorance, arrogance, and isolation."³ This project dares to hope that such a work can open the eyes of an ignorant people who choose not to see; can

² Lipshitz, *Possessive Investment*, viii.

³ Mary Elizabeth Hobgood, *Dismantling Privilege: An Ethics of Accountability* (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 2000), 10.

humble a people whose arrogance blinds them to their continued injustices; and can create a desire for relationships that will no longer permit such injustices to continue.

Having said that, it is believed that the raising of such consciousness, whether at the personal or the cultural level, is but one very small (albeit very significant) step toward justice and equality for all people (in the end, that's what this is really about). These goals are somewhat beyond the purview of a doctoral thesis: of this the author is fully aware. He none-the-less remains hopeful that they serve as its natural byproduct.

Because he will be using these terms quite frequently throughout this work, and accepting the phenomena they are meant to represent as givens in our culture, it is important from the outset to be very clear about what is meant when about white power, white privilege, and white supremacy. Here is a brief look at each of them.

White Power

Authority, right, control, influence: let's accept these as synonyms for, if not definitions of, power. White power is a systemically established, culturally accepted norm which guarantees that all authority, right, control, and influence will be granted to people in the white community.

White power manifests itself in a myriad of ways in this culture.

The wages of whiteness are not only psychological; they are also material and concrete. In addition to providing emotional compensation for the suffering involved in being faithful to industrial morality, whiteness provides invisible affirmative action for whites in the economic, political, cultural, and ecological spheres. A major feature of whiteness is its unequal access to power, privileges, and benefits in all sectors of the society.⁴

⁴ Ibid., 49.

Whites control the dissemination of information, whether that be through the establishment of curricula in schools (especially those texts that cast the light of American history in less shadowed tones than truth itself would); the broadcast, coverage, and interpretation of events through our mass media outlets; the decisions made about how, when, and where politicians will converse, debate, and speechify (as well as the content of what such discourse will include); the creation and distribution of propaganda designed to inform, misinform, and disinform the American public, its allies, and its enemies.

Whites own and control the vast majority of capital and land in this country, thereby affording them the right, the authority, and the ability to decide who will move into what neighborhoods, which will be granted start-up loans for small businesses, who will be granted permits and bank loans for new construction.

Whites own and control the vast majority of businesses and large industries in America, thereby giving them the right to control hiring practices and laws, set standard wages and maintain cost of living adjustments, and determine who will be hired and under what conditions they will be terminated.

Whites sit on the boards and occupy the presidency of the vast majority of institutions of higher learning in this country, giving them the ability to not only control the agendas and curricula on those campuses, but to determine who will be hired to teach those courses and more importantly, which of them will be granted tenure and which will not. And even more perniciously here, they have the right and the authority to establish the conditions under which such tenure will be granted and to offer the reasons why or why not someone might be granted this privilege. This same position also affords them

the right to determine which students will and will not be granted access to these centers of higher learning: and as debate about whether or not Affirmative Actions policies are legal on college campuses continues to be engaged in courts throughout the land, these same boards of admission continue to practice policies of patronage and legacy that affirmative action is meant to offset, but which themselves go unchallenged.

Whites control the police force, the prison system, and the legislation that proscribes for both of the former who will be taken into custody, for what reasons they will be taken into custody, for how long they will be held there, the conditions under which they will be held and detained, and the treatment they will receive while under detention.

As the project itself will demonstrate, whites control religion in this culture, which is to say that whites determine for most worshippers in this culture how God will be portrayed; what language about God is acceptable; and which theologians merit the honor of being taught to seminarians training to preach the gospel in our churches. Whites sit on the boards and committees that test those ready for ordination, which gives them the *de facto* right to establish an orthodoxy beyond which rights for ordination will not be granted. White clergy in white churches control the content of sermon material. White boards of white churches control what type and kind of information can go out in newsletters, pamphlets, and bulletins bearing the name of their church.

James Cone writes: "For blacks in white churches, the white denial of the theological value of black history and culture in the doing of theology meant a denial of black humanity and an establishment of white Christianity as normative for all

Christians.”⁵ While this is a clear distortion of truth, it is nonetheless made possible by the system of white power of which we speak.

This is not by any means a comprehensive list. It does, however, make the point: power in America is held by a white community. Such power, control, authority, influence, and right manifest themselves in many ways, and have far-reaching ramifications. George Lipshitz writes:

public policy and private prejudice have created a “possessive investment in whiteness” that is responsible for the racialized hierarchies of our society. I use the term “possessive investment” both literally and figuratively. Whiteness has a cash value; it accounts for advantages that come to individuals through profits made from housing secured in discriminatory markets, through unequal educations allocated to children of different races, through insider networks that channel employment opportunities to the relatives and friends of those who have profited most from present and past racial discrimination, and especially through intergenerational transfers of inherited wealth that pass on the spoils of discrimination to succeeding generations.⁶

White Privilege

Racial imagery is central to the organization of the modern world. At what cost regions and countries export their goods, whose voices are listened to at international gatherings, who bombs and who is bombed, who gets what jobs, housing, and access to health care and education, what cultural activities are subsidized and sold, in what terms they are validated—these are all largely inextricable from racial imagery. . . . Race is not the only factor governing these things and people of goodwill everywhere struggle to overcome the prejudices and barriers of race, but it is never not a factor, never not in play.

George Lipshitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness*

⁵ James Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (New York, NY: Orbis, Maryknoll, 1987), 47.

⁶ Lipshitz, *Possessive Investment*, vii.

Whereas the concept of power focuses primarily on the systemic, accepted norm and those who have the authority, influence, control, and right to develop and maintain it, privilege takes a very serious look at who *benefits from*, and in what ways do they benefit from, the decisions made by those in power.

Not only do whites control power in this culture, they work to ensure that the beneficiaries of that power go disproportionately to their white counterparts and underlings. Even whites who have no real economic or political clout benefit in very real ways from the color of their skin. “Whites may or may not be openly racist in their personal decisions or private interactions with others, but they none-the-less benefit systematically from the structural impediments to minority access to quality housing, schools, and jobs.”⁹

In an essay written for *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, Peggy McIntosh lists 26 ways in which she and all whites in this culture directly benefit from white privilege every day. She does not imagine that this list is comprehensive, but she does wish to illustrate in very concrete ways the point that is being made here: “white privilege is an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day.”¹⁰ It is for this reason that the author makes the claim that one cannot be white in this culture and not be racist. Built into the system is a cache of material and substantial benefits that whites receive every day, whether they want them

⁹ Lipshitz, *Possessive Investment*, 46.

¹⁰ Peggy McIntosh, “White Privilege: Unpacking the Knapsack,” in *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, ed. Paula S. Rothenberg (New York, NY: Worth Publishers, 2002), 97.

or not, whether they ask for them or not, whether they feel they deserve them or not. As was the case in the previous section, so too is it true here: white privilege manifests itself in a myriad of ways every day in this culture.

When whites walk into a store, they can feel relatively assured that not only will the people who serve them look like them, but so too will most of the patrons. Whites know that when they walk into a grocery store, they will carry the foods that they like. They know that when they go to get my hair cut, the barber will not only look like them, but he will know enough about their hair qualities that it can be reasonably assumed that he will cut it just the way they like it without a great deal of explanation. They know that when they go to a restaurant, the food on the menu will be food that they are used to eating and will satisfy their taste.

The author knows that as a white person in this culture, he can walk into a job interview anywhere in this country and be reasonably assured that the person interviewing him for the position will look like him. This will become an important factor as we begin our actual study of the white clergy in the Missouri Mid-South conference. He can be confident that the person conducting the interview will understand the vocabulary he is accustomed to using. He knows that when he sits down in a classroom to take a test, the language used in the examination will be language with which he is familiar. He also can be reasonably assured that the color of his white skin will not be used against him when applying for the job.

He knows that at any time of the night or day, and day of the week, and week during the year he can turn on the television and see people who look like, act like, think like, and speak like him.

He knows that every day he can find a newspaper on just about any street corner, convenience store, grocery store, or department store whose articles were written by people who look and write like him. He can listen to news on the radio and find those who are speaking like him, and be reasonably assured that those who are paying for them to speak also look and speak like him, and knows what he would like to hear on any given day. The same is true for any news broadcast found on the television on any given day in any given city in this country.

He knows that if he wants to go into a store and buy a doll for his daughter, or a toy athlete for his son he can find one whose skin tone most closely resembles theirs.

He is aware that no matter where he moves in this country, he can find a home in a neighborhood where neighbors look like him. He can also find a school whose student body and faculty look like his children. He can find in that same neighborhood a church whose pastor and members look like him. He can look for and find as well a community whose local school board, city and county officials, mayor, and police force look like him. Because that is true, he can drive the streets of that community without any fear of being unnecessarily pulled over and mistreated by the police, or being afraid of what my neighbors will do when he leaves the house. He can drop his children off at school without ever thinking about whether or not they will be treated differently because of their skin color. And he can rest assured that when he worships on Sunday, he will hear hymns, sermons, and prayers that confirm his feelings of comfort and security.

All of this, and much, much more, comes to him as a benefit of white skin color. He does not have the power himself to create such a system (that work has been accomplished by others and lies at the heart of the discussion about white power), and yet

he receives every day white skin privileges that are denied others. Silence on such matters makes all whites co-conspirators and perpetrators of a gross injustice. This is the indictment of a white culture whose own privileges remain largely invisible to them: “A first step for white people, I think, is to not be afraid to admit that we have benefited from white privilege.”¹¹

While ignorance may be bliss, it can no longer be defended by, nor serve as the defense of a white population that grows rich at the expense of blacks in this culture. White skin privilege is very real, and has produced lasting and dire consequences. Part of what will be tested is whether or not the white church has benefited from white skin privilege; whether or not it is aware of this; and whether or not it has any real interest in making itself and its members aware of their collective privilege in order to bring an end to this system of patronage and legacy.

White Supremacy

And what is it that we want to do? Why, it is, within the limits imposed by the Federal Constitution, to establish white supremacy in this state.

As a matter of fact, the negro never was a slave. To conceive the design of enslaving an individual we must presuppose that he is free; the first act of enslavement is to deprive him of his liberty. This the Negro never had since the creation of man. The negro is an ape. . . . The will of God upon this important subject, as expressed in those original statutes given man in the Creation, “Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth,” is the supreme law of the universe; and in the eyes of this great law there is not today, there never was and there never can be on this earth, such a thing as a free Negro.

¹¹ Robert Jensen, “White Privilege Shapes the U.S.” in Rothenberg, *White Privilege*, 106.

Thomas Jefferson, quoted in Gilbert Osofsky's *The Burden of Race: A Documentary History of Negro-White Relations in America*

White supremacy is a structure and system of beliefs that make possible white power and white privilege. No nation, no culture can sustain for so long such an injustice without the political, religious, scientific, and ideological will and imagination that allows it to breath and gives it life. In this section, a brief history of just such will and imagination will be examined, along with the roots of white supremacy from which grew the weed of racism in America.

Randall Robinson describes his first visit to the Rotunda in our nation's capitol building:

I looked straight up and immediately saw the callous irony, wondering if the slaves who had helped to erect the structure might have bristled at it as quickly as I. . . . Symbolizing the carapace of American liberty, sixty-odd robed figures are arranged in heroic attitudes around a majestic Washington, before whom a white banner is unfurled bearing the Latin phrase *E Pluribus Unum*, or *out of one many*. But all of the *many* in the fresco are white.¹²

Such is the power of story told by white ideologues in this culture. White supremacy is established in such moments as these. It was the hope that for all eternity, the tale of this nation would be remembered in ways that ensured the supremacy of the white race. The only faces worth engraving in the dome of our beloved capitol were the white ones. Built on the backs of broken black slaves who are written out of the story, this monument stands as an homage to white power and privilege.

Randall will continue his walk around the capitol, and as he does he describes the scenes painted into the rim of the dome that depict other moments in time, from the early

¹² Robinson, *The Debt*, 1.

years of American history and exploration to the dawn of aviation. Of these scenes he writes: “Although the practice of slavery lay heavily athwart the new country for most of the depicted age, the frieze presents nothing at all from this long, scarring period. No Douglas. No Tubman. No slavery. No blacks, period.”¹³

The founders of this country did their best to tell the story of our origins in lily white shades of half truths, innuendo, and—yes, at times—outright lies. The foundations of their world were built upon the pillars of Manifest Destiny and White Privilege. It was their belief that they were the ordained and chosen rulers of a master class, and that the rest of the savage world—from the African tribal clansmen to the Native American already inhabiting the soil they would soon appropriate—cried out for their masterful control of them in the hope that in time they too would become civilized.

In his book *The Burden of Race*, Gilbert Osofsky quotes Thomas Jefferson: “I advance it as a suspicion only that the blacks, whether originally a distinct race, or made distinct by time and circumstances, are inferior to the whites in the endowments both of body and mind.”¹⁴ Later in the same book, Osofsky quotes Jefferson much more extensively. Here, this founding father not only gives breath to the suspicions of his own mind, but in the process helps shape the identity of a nation we are beholden to even now. Know that as this passage begins, Jefferson is answering a question he himself has posed: why not just free the black man and incorporate him into society with the rest of white civilization:

The first difference which strikes us is that of colour. . . . And is this difference of no importance? *Is it not the foundation of a*

¹³ Ibid., 1-2.

¹⁴ Thomas Jefferson, quoted in *The Burden of Race: A Documentary History of Negro-White Relations in America* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1967), 5-6.

greater or less share of beauty in these two races? Are not the fine mixtures of red and white, the expressions of every passion by greater or less suffusions of colour in the one preferable to that eternal monotony, which reigns in the countenances, that immoveable veil of black which covers all the emotions of the other race? Add to these, flowing hair, a more elegant symmetry of form, their own judgment in favor of the whites, declared by their preference of them, as uniformly as is *the preference of the Oranootan (orangutan) for the black women over those of his own species*. The circumstance of superior beauty, is thought worthy of attention in the propagation of horses, dogs, and other domestic animals; why not in that of man? Besides those of colour, figure, and hair, there are other physical distinctions proving a difference of race. . . . They secrete less by the kidneys, and more by the glands of the skin, which gives them a very strong and disagreeable odour. . . . They are at least as brave, and more adventuresome. But this may perhaps proceed from *a want of forethought*, which prevents their seeing a danger till it be present. . . . They are more ardent after their female: but love seems with them to be more an eager desire, than a tender delicate mixture of sentiment and sensation. In general, *their existence appears to participate more of sensation than reflection*.¹⁵ (Italics added for emphasis.)

Upon such principles and assumptions was this land built and her ethos shaped.

From the outset, the notion of white supremacy was a given, and this fundamental perception has determined the landscape of American politics, jurisprudence, and culture ever since. That single quote in the middle of this last section from Jefferson sums up the fundamental principle of white supremacy. When he himself asks whether or not skin coloration makes any difference, he answers his own questions when he writes: is it not the foundation of a greater or less share of beauty in the two races? This prevailing mindset would determine courses of action for an entire nation.

Nothing would be done that did not reflect this fundamental notion: built into the white skin is a greater share of beauty—and to that one would add ability, intelligence, discipline, rationality, etc.

¹⁵ Thomas Jefferson, "Racial Views of a Founding Father," in Osofsky, *Burden of Race*, 50-51.

In his book *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*, Leon F. Litwack points out that before the time of Reconstruction “no need was felt for statutory measures segregating the races.”¹⁶ Race hatred and segregation was so much a part of the life-blood of this early nation, and the culture from the outset was so determined by that foundational principle, that laws were not needed to create the kind of segregation that white supremacy demanded.

But all of that changed after the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation. The freeing of the slave did not bring about the kind of equality dreamed of by those who imagined a different world for the black slave. White folk everywhere were unwilling to admit a new world view that allowed for the possibility that, in fact, all men were created equal. And during the time of Reconstruction, long held beliefs and assumptions about the order of the races had to be codified in order to protect and preserve what white supremacy had always been afforded the white race in this country.

But in the 1890s whites perceived in the behavior of “uppity” (and invariably younger) blacks a growing threat or indifference to the prevailing customs, habits, and etiquette. Over the next two decades, white Southerners would construct in response an imposing and extensive system of legal mechanisms designed to institutionalize the already familiar and customary subordination of black men and women. Between 1890 and 1915, *state after state wrote the prevailing racial customs and habits into the statute books*. Jim Crow came to the South in an expanded and more rigid form, partly in response to fears of a new generation of blacks unschooled in racial etiquette and to growing doubts that this generation *could be trusted to stay in its place without legal force*.¹⁷ (Italics added for emphasis.)

¹⁶ Leon F. Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 229.

¹⁷ Ibid., 230.

One of the many ways this manifested itself was in property rights, laws, and practices. Although the Supreme Court ruled in 1917 that municipal laws and zoning codes could not restrict access based on race, it was not until 1948 that the court agreed that private, racially restrictive contracts were unenforceable through judicial action. Here are some excerpts from some of those contracts and property manuals:

- Any property owner who sells property anywhere in our district to undesirables is an enemy to the white owner and should be discovered and punished. Protect your property! Property conservatively valued at \$50,000,000 owned by some 10,000 individuals is menaced by a Negro invasion of Hyde Park. The thing is simply impossible and must not occur.
- Every colored man who moves into Hyde Park knows that he is damaging his white neighbors' property.
- People who sell their property to Negroes and take first and second mortgages and promises to pay monthly sums do not know what risks they are taking in trying to collect the money. Mrs. Nora Foster of 4207 Prairie sold her house to some niggers and when she went to collect she was assaulted and thrown down a flight of stairs. This is not a case of saying it served her right because more than seven of her neighbors sold before Mrs. Foster did, but it does serve as a splendid example of the fact that niggers are undesirable neighbors and entirely irresponsible and vicious.
- Under the terms of this agreement all property owners in the area agree not to sell or rent their premises to negroes for a period of approximately twenty-one years.¹⁸

White supremacy is built into the genes of white American culture. It is so ingrained into the very fabric of life in this nation that it need not be taught in overt ways anymore. "The hatred of the blacks has been so deeply bound up with being an American that it has been one of the first things new Americans learn and one of the last things old

¹⁸ Osofsky, *Burden of Race*, 310-312.

Americans forget.”¹⁹ White children grow up feeling superior; and black children internalize centuries of rage that have built up around them.

A life is an eternity and throughout that eternity a black child has breathed the foul air of cruelty. He has grown up to find that his spirit was crushed before there was need of it. His ambitions, even in their own forming, showed him to have set his hand against his own. This is the desolation of black life in America.²⁰

It is written into our laws; into our zoning regulations; into our history text books; into the districting of political boundaries; into our banking regulations and loaning guidelines: white skin power and privilege both derive from and perpetuate the notion of white skin supremacy in America. From Jefferson and Washington at our outset, to Strom Thurmond and Trent Lott today, the political, judicial, theological, and economic landscape of America is lit by the ever rising star of the White race and the shadowy pall of hatred and disrespect it has cast over the Black: “All black people in the United States, irrespective of their class status or politics, live with the possibility that they will be terrorized by whiteness.”²¹

¹⁹ William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *Black Rage* (New York, NY: Basic Books, Inc., 1968), 204.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 208.

²¹ bell hooks, “Representations of Whiteness in the Black Imagination,” in Rothenberg, *White Privilege*, 23.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

“Obtaining precise data is not always easy.”¹ This is an understatement. And yet - easy or not - this is exactly what one engaged in research must set out to do: obtain precise data.

In this chapter, the author will lay out the methods employed in obtaining the data used to support the conclusions. He will speak of each in greater detail in subsequent chapters. They are listed here in the order in which they will appear in this thesis: a survey written and developed for the purpose of this project and sent to 100 white clergy of the MMSUCC (discussed in Chapter 5); a series of interviews with local clergy of the MMSUCC (Chapter 6); and a sampling of 100 newsletters from white churches with white pastors in the MMSUCC (Chapter 7). Each of these pieces stands on its own as an independent source of information about the role that white power, privilege, and supremacy plays in the life of these white clergy people.

Survey

With the help of his peer group, mentor, and professional associates, the author created a two part survey comprised of thirty-one statements (part 1) and sixteen open questions in which the participant was asked to fill in a blank to complete a statement.

¹ Nancy Jean Vyhmeister, *Your Indispensable Guide to Writing Quality Research Papers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 127.

The purpose of the survey itself was twofold: to discover the extent to which white clergy in the MMSUCC were beneficiaries of white power and privilege; and, if that proved to be the case, determine the extent to which they were aware of this privilege.

Section One, in which respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a closed statement, was designed to create a general, overall impression of the group being surveyed. Focusing primarily on attitudes and identities, these statements were specifically designed to uncover any overt racist tendencies *within the group as a whole*. (While it may be possible to speak of the racist tendencies of individuals within the group who completed the survey, this was not the purpose of this project.) The analysis of this section of the survey, which will be discussed in the next chapter, will serve as a backdrop to everything that will follow. It will give us a general picture against which to test the voracity of the collective beliefs of the white clergy of the conference when measured side by side with their actual behavior. General observations only can be gleaned from this part of the survey, but these general observations will serve as an important prelude to the rest of the project.

While it is not the purpose of these introductory comments to uncover the precise information suggested in this survey, it is important here for the purpose of establishing the basis for this work to use an example. It is important before we go into the rest of the project to know that data suggests that 98% of the white clergy of the Conference agree that race is a problem in America today. That in and of itself will serve to help understand, interpret, and find meaning in the later discovery that from this same group of clergy data suggests that 53% did not even once in the last year preach a sermon about

race; another 20% preached about race only once; and in the 100 newsletters not one of those preachers wrote about the issue of race (only one even mentioned race anywhere in an article.) Indeed, the only way to make use of the information gathered from the survey itself, the interviews, and the newsletters is to first determine the overall racial attitudes prevalent in the white clergy of the MMSUCC.

There has been much discussion within the peer group about the precise nature of the first part of the survey. It was originally developed and sent to participants in a format that allowed them to read a given, closed statement for which they would choose a given number (1 – 5) that correlated with their feeling about that statement. A number one would indicate strong agreement; two, agreement; three would indicate that they have no opinion about the statement; four, disagreement; and five, strong disagreement. While in a class discussing how to document the results of such a piece, it was disclosed that the entire project itself might not be valid unless it was first tested to determine the extent to which what was being asked in the survey in fact had the ability to disclose the kind of information it was seeking to obtain.

After some initial panic (only exacerbated by the discovery that such a testing would cost thousands of dollars and take months, if not years of research), the author's peer group, mentor, and the professional associate enlisted specifically for help in this area all agreed on two things. First, it was not feasible at all to pay to have the survey validated. Second, it was not necessary to throw the findings of the piece out and start all over. What would need to happen in the reporting of the results of the survey was to disclose only whether or not a participant agreed with the statement – not the extent to which they agreed. In effect, the results of the survey would be used as a *de facto*

true/false questionnaire, asking only whether the participant agreed with the statement or not. Even the professor who initially reported to that what had been done did not meet the standards accepted as the norm for these types of projects agreed that this was a workable solution: and a major crisis was avoided.

Therefore, when the results of this initial part of the survey designed to elicit the racial attitudes and beliefs of the white clergy of the MMSUCC are reported, the author will record only the percentage of those white clergy whom the data suggests accept the statement as true and the percentage that the data suggests accept the statement as false. And only the information gleaned from this reporting will serve to influence the final outcome of any conclusions drawn at the end of this project.

100 surveys were sent out (the survey itself is included in the Appendix to this work) to white clergy in the MMSUCC. Included was a cover letter (also in the Appendix), and a self-addressed, stamped envelope into which they were to place the completed survey and mail it back to the author. He received back 70 of the initial 100 sent out. Nowhere on the survey was the identity revealed of the one completing it.

After the surveys came back, the author began a thorough compilation of the data. He developed a number of tables to help me formulate the data. Part I, consisting of the true/false section, simply required him to make a list with each statement of the number who agreed with the statement and the number who disagreed. From this, simple calculations could be made to determine the percentage of those who disagreed and agreed with each of the statements. After this was done, a ranking could be made of each of the thirty-one statements, listing them in such a way as to disclose which statement the white clergy of the MMSUCC collectively most agreed with all the way down, in

descending order, to which one they collectively most disagreed with. This would then give me the ability to generalize about the overall racial attitudes of the white clergy of the MMSUCC.

Part II, while similar in nature, in that it, too, required the simple process of collecting, reading, analyzing and interpreting the statistical data collected in this part of the survey, was at the same time very different, in that it was not limited to or dependent on a simple agree/disagree response. The information sought here had to do with the frequency with which certain events occurred in the normal life patterns of our white MMSUCC clergy. Each event in question was specifically chosen to help determine the practice of racial discrimination amongst the churches of the MMSUCC led by white clergy. It is a modified version of what some have come to call a racial inventory, and it seeks to determine the extent to which—in this instance white MMSUCC churches led by white clergy—participate in an all white culture.

This is the important next step in the study. While racial attitudes may reflect one collective truth about this particular group, those attitudes must be tested against their actual practices. In other words, does this group practice what they preach; do they walk the walk, or just talk the talk? Does this group believe one thing in principal about race and practice something else, or do their collective patterns and structures of life and living reflect well what they believe to be true about race in our culture? These are the very important questions this survey is enlisted to help us answer as we try to reveal the extent to which white power, privilege, and supremacy invade the life not just of America, but—more importantly for our purposes here - the church in America.

For each “Fill-in-the-Blank” statement, the simple collection and enumeration of responses was recorded and tabulated. After this compilation of data was completed, two separate lists of very basic information could be formulated. The first was simply the total number of occurrences of each event recorded from the seventy participants (I say seventy knowing that the total number for each statement is at variance with the others since some surveys left some of the responses blank). The second was the average of a MMSUCC congregation led by a white clergy person. For example, we might discover that a total of thirty-five black children were confirmed by the seventy pastors reporting for an average per church of .5 black members confirmed (these numbers used here do not reflect actual numbers from the survey itself, but serve only to illustrate the principle.)

After the initial data was thus tabulated, it became apparent that some additional observations needed to be made in order to clarify the picture. There are times when simply reporting totals and averages served only to distort the actual picture. For example, sixty-nine clergy report that they think about their race, on average, zero times per day, while the one remaining clergy says she does so seventy times per day (again, not actual numbers from the survey). The final conclusion would be misleading, as I would report that our clergy think about their race about seventy times per day, each clergy averaging one such thought per day. That would distort the actual fact that all but one never, think about their race.

Therefore, at times it becomes important to note, along with the totals collected and their commensurate averages and percentages any additional information that might present the clearer picture and reveal the deeper truths behind the numbers. If one person

in the survey, or even a simple few, were remarkably inconsistent with a vast majority of others who presented a more consistent tendency, then such occurrences will be noted.

As was the case with Part I of this survey, this section is also included in the Appendix.

Interviews

Five interviews were conducted with five white clergy from the MMSUCC. A copy of the questions that were used in each of the interviews is printed in the Appendix. The questions were arrived at after lengthy conversation with my professional associates. The purpose of the interviews was to try and go deeper with some questions than one can get with a simple survey. As Nancy Jean Vyhmeister writes, "Interviews permit a deeper and fuller understanding of the attitudes of a respondent."²

The author chose the ministers to be interviewed personally. He tried very hard to get a variety in terms of age, gender, and geography. The MMSUCC is divided geographically into three regions, and he was careful that at least one minister from each of these regions was interviewed. Each of the interviewees was told about the subject matter for this thesis and study, but nothing about the content of the interview itself: they were not prepared ahead of time for the specific questions they would answer. Each of them was asked for permission to be taped for the interview, and all of them agreed to do that.

No notes were taken during the interview. The author tried very hard to stick to the scripted questions that were prepared ahead of time, so that each one interviewed would hear the same questions in roughly the same order. He did allow himself

² Ibid., 136.

opportunities for follow-up questions for clarity, especially when it was felt that a particular answer did not really focus on the question that was posed. Those few follow-up questions will account for the only variances in the interview questions themselves.

Following the interviews, he listened to the tapes a number of times, taking and comparing notes each time he did so. With each review of the tapes, some impressions were formed, and eventually a few patterns emerged that are examined in Chapter 6. In addition to these particular patterns, there were individual responses that bear note. Those, too, will be looked at in Chapter 6.

Newsletters

It was during the author's early peer sessions, when conversation about each of projects began to take place, that a number of options began to emerge that would help him approach his goal. Among the many options proposed, one of the ones that was most intriguing to him was the possibility of examining written documents produced by the various churches.

It was one of his professional associates who pointed out that any conclusions drawn from any research project needed to have all of its data triangulated. In other words, three independent sources of information must be explored for any research conclusions to be validated. He would be doing the surveys and the interviews, but didn't settle right away on the third piece until the very last. Originally it was proposed that historical records of these churches be examined, but that presented some logistical problems. Acquiring enough of these records would mean separate trips to each of the churches: an investment in time and travel that could not have been afforded.

A second alternative seemed more likely, and certainly much more feasible. In his position as Associate Conference Minister in the Conference, the author gets mailed to him every month newsletters from most member churches. He asked his colleagues on staff who represent the two other associations in the Conference if they too would collect newsletters for him, and they agreed to do that.

Over a four month period, 100 such newsletters were collected from churches across the conference. These newsletters represent churches served by white pastors. They are from rural, suburban, and urban congregations. Some of them come from very large congregations, and some from very small congregations. They range in length from four or five pages to fifty-four pages.

None of the churches from which the newsletters were collected were aware of the fact that their newsletters were used for the purpose of this study. This was intentional, as the author did not want any of them changing or amending their content or form in order to impress. This would have skewed the data. In the end therefore, a much more honest portrayal of what churches feel the need to write about and communicate to each other when they produce these documents would be found.

Each of these newsletters was read front to back a number of times. The author made notes with each reading, each time looking for something different. For example, he would read through each newsletter and count the number of times that a person of color was represented in the graphic designs used by the editor or publisher. He would then count the number of times that a white person was represented. On the front cover of each newsletter, he would record the tally: number of black portrayals, and number of white portrayals. If a graphic did not portray either a black or a white, he did not count it

in the tally. There was not an accounting for other races. Also, if it was not clear what race was being portrayed (not unusual on many computer generated graphics), he did not count them. He tallied only those images whose race was immediately apparent, and could be identified as black or white.

The next thing he did was read the article written by the pastor. Every newsletter used in this study had an article written by a pastor, and many of them had more than one (usually the result of a multiple staff). What he recorded here was the number of articles written by the pastor that directly addressed the issue of race. Also on the front cover of that newsletter, he wrote whether or not race was addressed by the pastor. In addition to counting the number of articles that directly addressed race, he counted the number of times in an article written by a white pastor that race was mentioned at all, no matter how peripheral it may have been to the matter of race as a subject (for example, a pastor may have written in an article about a favorite hymn that the hymn was written by a black woman). Not only was that number also recorded on the front of the newsletter, but the statement itself was highlighted, circled, or underlined in the body of the article so that he could easily reference it later.

The third thing he did was peruse the entire newsletter then for any article written by anybody that addressed the matter of race. As in the previous case, the number of such articles was recorded on the cover. Also, he then did the same thing here that he did with the pastor's articles, searching further for any mention of any kind in any article of race—whether the article in question had anything to do with race or not. That number was recorded on the cover.

CHAPTER THREE

CONTEXT

A Race History of Missouri

Estimates ranging anywhere from 50,000 to 20,000 years ago place the first settlers in the land we now call America. There is some debate about the exact dates. None-the-less, the fertile land of the great rivers, the variety of flower and fauna, animal and vegetable, and the centrality of the particular piece of land now known as Missouri (whose name is borrowed from one of the two large tribes that inhabited the area—more on that shortly) made it one to which many natives would soon come. Solid evidence exists that dates early tribal communities around the river basins of Missouri 12,000 years ago around the Bourbuese and Pomme de Terre rivers. Radiocarbon testing of fluted forms indicates that early hunters roamed the area. Much more credible evidence locates tribes of hunters at mammoth kill sites in Southwest Missouri around 9500–9000 BC.

Over millenia, these tribes continued to inhabit and hunt the rich lands and tributaries surrounding the basins of the great Missouri and Mississippi rivers. The native tribes identified later by white settlers (whose presence on the land began what one text referred to as “historic times”—the rest of history being relegated to “pre-historic times,” or the time that pre-dates the white-European) were primarily the Osage and the Missouri. Smaller bands of Kaskaskia from west of the Mississippi, or Delaware and Shawnee further south, the Iowa tribe from the north and Kansas from the west, along

with—at various times-Sauk, Fox, Miami, Piankishaw, and Wea all lived in Missouri for short periods of time.

The Osage, whose cultural life resembled that of many prairie Indians, lived primarily in the southern part of Missouri. In a book documenting the history of Missouri before Lewis and Clark, a census of the tribe places them at around 9,000 in number. Another text, *Indians and Archeology of Missouri*, adds a rather cryptic line that glosses over a lot of sadness when it reports that (but not why): “Not until they moved from Missouri did they become more Plains-like.”¹

The Missouri tribes were located in the northern part of the river basins. They were renowned for their abilities to hunt and travel the great rivers in the area.

Both the name Mississippi and Missouri derive from the language of these early natives. Warriors of the Fox nation met a tribe who lived along the *mesis-peya*, or Mississippi River. There is some confusion about the precise origin of the name Missouri. Martin Hintz, in his book on Missouri history, makes the claim that it derived from the same Fox tribe, who used the word *Oumesuorit*, or “Big-Canoe People,” to describe them.² However, the New International Encyclopedia of 1905 claims that the name is of Algonquin origin, and means “great muddy.”³ (vol. 13, p621)

By the mid to late seventeenth century, the first Europeans began to arrive on the scene, and life for these natives would change dramatically. In 1673, the white settlers

¹ Carl H. Chapman and Eleanor H. Chapman, *Indians and Archeology of Missouri* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1983), 16.

² Martin Hintz, *Missouri* (New York, NY: Grolier Publishing, 1999), 4-5.

³ Daniel Coit Gilman, LL. D., Harry Thurston Peck, and Frank Moore Cody, eds., *The New International Encyclopedia*, vol. 13 (New York, NY: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1905), 621.

Marquette and Joliette sailed down the Mississippi as far as the Arkansas, and established in their wake a number of trading posts that in time would develop into larger white settlements (among these were the very first white settlements in Missouri, the city of Genevieve, and the larger and much wider known white settlement, St. Louis). In 1763, the land around Missouri was ceded by the Peace of Paris from Spain to France as part of the Louisiana Territory. Many French traders congregated in the St. Louis area, making it a capitol of sorts for the white fur traders and river dwellers of the time.

The fate of Missouri's role in the slave trade was accelerated by the Ordinance of 1787, a piece of white federal legislation that deemed that no parts of the Northwest Territory could include slavery. Because of that, white southerners and white southern sympathizers flocked to Missouri, and colonization of the area was greatly advanced. In 1803, the white federal government of the United States purchased all of the Louisiana territory from the white government of France, a parcel of land that included Missouri. This entire territory was divided by a line at the 33rd parallel, and from the time of 1812 forward became known amongst the white European settlers as the territory of Missouri. At this time, the population of white settlers numbered about 20,000 (or about twice that of the native Osage, one of two large tribes that had been in the area for thousands of years – that was about to change). Three years later, in 1815, the census records a population of about 66,000, of which about 10,000 were African slaves. Native titles to this land were extinguished in quick order by white courts, and between the years 1800 and 1824 almost all of their land was “ceded” to the white US government.

In 1817, Missouri's white settlers applied for admission as a state to the union, beginning what would be marked as one of the bloodiest debates for statehood in white

US history. By 1820, the required constitution had been written, and it included the right to own slaves, and forbade any free Negro or mulatto to ever take up residence in the state. Missouri, in 1821, was admitted as a state, but only after they promised that this clause would never be enforced. This became a small part of what is now known as the Missouri Compromise, about which we must now say more.

In 1820, after an embroiled debate amongst white federal legislators in Washington, D.C. (a city named for one of Americas largest white slave owners), Missouri was admitted to the union as the last slave state. To balance this decision – one that mattered because electoral votes hung in the balance – Maine was admitted as a free state. The debate began a year earlier when a white legislator from New York, James W. Talmage, proposed an amendment to the Missouri constitution that would prohibit slavery. Under the guise of defending states rights, southern white legislators opposed this amendment. Only after a year and a half of debate was the issue settled, and Missouri was received as a slave state and Maine as a free sate. Earlier that same year, Alabama's admission as a slave state made the number of slave and free states equal. Talmage's bill actually passed in the House, but failed in the Senate. The Compromise that came admitted Missouri as a slave state, Maine as free (keeping the electoral college balanced, something the white slave supporters of the south insisted on), and prohibited any state entering the union after that and north of Missouri's southern border from ever holding slaves or allowing involuntary servitude.

Within the state, a number of its citizens fought for the cause of abolition and the freedom of the black slaves, but this only further entrenched the pro-slavery white southerners. Among them was governor Claiborne Jackson, elected just before the

outbreak of Civil War and author of the Jackson Resolutions denying the power of the Federal Government to dictate to states their status concerning slavery. Talk of secession from the union began. At the state convention of 1860, the pro-secessionists lost the popular vote, and when Lincoln called upon governor Jackson to provide troops for the war effort, the governor refused to supply them. He called the Civil War an 'unholy crusade.' He commanded the state militia to take up arms and fled to the south of Missouri with the troops and began his own civil war in the state between his men and the white federal troops under the command of the white Colonel Lyon and volunteers deployed out of St. Louis. He took most of the legislature with him, prompting union loyalists at the state convention to declare all offices held by Jackson and his men vacant, at which time they elected an entirely new slate of legislators and wrote a whole new constitution, this one abolishing slavery. The fugitive legislature responded by declaring that they were still the legitimate white authority in the state, and that Missouri would now become a part of the Southern Confederacy. The northern abolitionist government in 1863 passed a declaration of Emancipation, effectively returning all slaves to their formerly held freedom (before they were abducted by their white captors from their African homeland) by the year 1870. Severe political disabilities were imposed after the Civil War on all southern sympathizers, including the denial of the vote to those who participated in the rebellion. This prohibition remained intact until 1871, when a third constitution was written and legislation more liberal to the southern white sympathizers was enacted.

It was at about this same time that two other events occurred that capture our attention. In 1857, Dred Scott, a Missouri slave who had petitioned for his freedom under

the white man's law, had his case appealed all the way to the United States' all white Supreme Court. That court, whose positions at the time were filled with all white males, ruled against Dred Scott. The case garnered national attention.

While in high school, I worked during the summer at Calvary Cemetery in St. Louis cutting grass around the graves. I was cutting around some very old and worn out graves one day when I looked up and saw the name Dred Scott on a headstone covered with grass and unkempt in a back corner of the cemetery. There was nothing that marked the grave of this proud and historic man; nothing at all like the shrubs and flags and towers that adorned the grave of William Tecumseh Sherman, a white Civil War general, at the entrance of the cemetery—the first thing any visitor saw and the first thing they were told about when they entered. In almost three summers work, no one had ever pointed out to me where Dred Scott was buried, and nothing indicated to a visitor that such a man was buried there. Had I not been paying attention while cutting around that stone, I would have never seen it myself.

The second event of note was the border skirmish between the predominantly pro-slavery Missouri and the pro-abolitionist, newly organized white Territory of Kansas. In these battles, white brothers fought against white brothers, white families against white families. These episodes of border warfare continued well past the end of the Civil War.

When the war ended, Missouri changed from its dependence on the river to a heavier dependence on rail lines. The fur industry that long supported the white raiders in Missouri was replaced by a greater dependency on farmland. White tenant farmers began to work the land after the war, replacing the labor of the African slave. Also after the war, bands of guerilla confederate soldiers roamed the land, robbing banks, burning houses,

and committing many murders. For this many were revered (and still are today) by white southern sympathizers. Throughout the state today the land of the Bald Knobbers (a group of white southerners in southwest Missouri known for their lynching, burning, and running out of town all black families) and the hideout of Jesse James (perhaps the best known of the infamous white guerrilla terrorists) remain two of the larger tourist attractions for white vacationers to the state.

Throughout the twentieth century, much of Missouri's income came from industries set up to supply and feed the armies and war efforts of the white maintained federal government of the United States. From farm crops and mining ores rich throughout the rural area of the state, to manufacturing and electric plants centered in the more urban areas, and even space industries like Boeing and McDonnell/Douglas, much of Missouri's capital and labor feeds the country's burgeoning military-industrial complex.

Schools in the state remained segregated through the 1960s. Although in 1954 the Federal Courts ruled against segregation, Missouri's law called for enforced segregation. It would be many years before most of Missouri's schools would integrate along the lines of race. This, coupled with the white flight out of most of the urban centers of Missouri's two large metropolitan areas (St. Louis and Kansas City), has led to some of the most racially divided public schools anywhere in the union. Still today, predominantly white populated areas generate much more public funding for their students' education than the largely black neighborhoods of the inner cities. White capital and taxable property moved from the urban centers in the '70s, and racial profiling among leading white bankers and

real estate companies have effected an actual, if not legal, color line in most cities, towns, suburbs, and schools within the state.

A Race History of the Missouri Conference

The Missouri Mid-South Conference of the United Church of Christ consists of a collection of congregations throughout the state of Missouri, and includes two churches in Little Rock, AR and Memphis, TN. There are roughly 180 churches in the Conference. Sixty of them are in St. Louis; sixty of them are in the eastern half of the state (excluding St. Louis); and 60 are in the western half of the state. On the whole, the conference and its churches are more conservative in nature than the denomination to which they belong, and this has been the source of no small amount of conflict in the life of the conference and of many of the local churches. This would be a good time to say a word about the polity and history of the United Church of Christ.

In 1957, two very diverse denominations-each of which had already gone through a previous merger in the 1930s-came together to form the United Church of Christ. They were the Evangelical and Reformed church, and the Congregational/Christian church. The former evolved over time from the reform movement of central and western Europe. The latter developed in part from the reformation of England (Congregational), and the spirit of the Great Awakening in the middle of the American 19th century. While many saw this as an unlikely union, with little hope for these two divergent peoples finding enough common ground on which to unite, they instead recognized a number of things that compelled them to make the effort.

Most prominent among those was a sense of the church as an effective agent for meaningful social and political change. There was also a respective desire to lay aside denominational and doctrinal differences for the sake of the gospel, taking seriously the unity found in the Body of Christ.

The motto of this newly formed United Church of Christ succinctly sums up its passion for such unity, and its willingness to lay aside profound differences in order to effect that. Taken from Jesus' prayer at the last meal he would share with his disciples, it reads quite simply: "That they may all be one." (Jn. 17:21: all biblical quotes, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the new Revised Standard Version.) One of the early pioneers of this uniting movement expressed the sentiment this way: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials liberty; in all things charity (love)."

This desire for unity, perhaps best characterized by the trite phrase that its members will "agree to disagree agreeably;" the Congregational church's insistence on the clear and certain autonomy of the local church; and the very natural alliance of denominations active in social justice and transformation has led to the emergence of what is now recognized as the most liberal denomination in the household of the Christian faith.

These liberal tendencies manifest themselves in many ways within the denomination. Openly gay and lesbian persons are ordained and called to serve UCC congregations. Likewise are their marriage vows blessed and recognized in its churches. The denomination has maintained throughout its history a firm belief in the right of any pregnant woman to determine the outcome of her pregnancy. Early in their respective histories, the churches that have formed the United Church of Christ produced many

great abolitionists, ordained the first woman to serve a church in America, and founded schools for women and people of color. They have proclaimed themselves to be a Just-Peace church, and a Multi-racial/Multi-Cultural church, and they back those proclamations up with such things as stock portfolios sensitive to various causes of justice, personnel policies requiring racial diversity (including a Justice and Witness Ministry - a full third of the governing body of the denomination - that must be comprised of no less than one-half people of color), the election of the first person of color to serve as an elected official in a predominantly white denomination, and so many other acts evident to all.

This is mentioned as background to what will follow about the Missouri Mid-South Conference of this United Church of Christ. It is far from the liberal outpost of Christianity that many presume to be true about the UCC. It often finds itself at odds with the national church, decrying such acts as the passage of resolutions calling for various boycotts (Shell oil and Taco Bell come immediately to mind); resolutions supporting the right of a woman to choose the outcome of her pregnancy; General Synod mandates calling for the removal of state sodomy laws criminalizing homosexual activity, for action from churches within states to effect this removal, and calling as well for the President of the UCC to call a press conference and make public the challenge to do such work every time he/she enters a state with such a law on the book. This last one in particular enraged many local churches, and would result in a plethora of phone calls the next week to the office of the Conference Minister, accompanied by threats to either withhold mission funds or to pull out of the denomination. In the last ten years, many

churches have taken that drastic step, removing themselves from the denomination in response to what they perceive as a church too liberal to be a part of God's realm.

Outside of St. Louis, and a handful of churches in the Kansas City area, the Conference is mostly a loose conglomeration of German Evangelical rural churches strung out along the rich farmland of the Missouri River as it winds its way eastward across the state. Historically, these churches and the towns in which they reside have been fairly conservative and almost entirely white.

Whereas the denomination has proclaimed itself to be Multi-racial and Multi-cultural, the Conference continues to struggle to find any racial diversity at all. There are currently in the Conference two African American pastors, two thoroughly African American congregations, and perhaps two or three with any significant racial diversity.

When the denomination restructured in the 1990s, it took a number of very small entities that worked for social justice and made them into a body that comprises a full third of its governing board. They call this body the Justice and Witness Ministry. When the Missouri Mid-South Conference restructured in the 1990s, it took its only authorized and recognized body for social change (easily and by far the smallest and least funded of its governing boards)-the Social Concerns Commission-and legislated it out of existence. Only when it was pointed out at one of its annual meetings that no such body now existed were members of one of the newly formed ministries asked to comprise an ad hoc committee that functions with little frequency and no power. Since that time, a Dismantling Racism Task Force has formed in the city of St. Louis.. This task force is beginning to function with growing recognition, but has effected few, if any changes, in the composition of the Conference or its member churches.

Three years ago, the Conference held its annual meeting in Little Rock, AR to remember the anniversary of the desegregation of its schools in the 1950s. The focus all week was on the sin of Racism, and many letters of anger were written following this event to the Conference Minister, bemoaning the fact that we would dredge up the sins of the past and not recognize that we had moved far beyond the ways of our past.

It is among the clergy of this conference that I propose to contextualize my work. This gives me a broad scope with which to deal and from which I can collect observable and meaningful data concerning this most heinous and persistent of social ills (white power and privilege).

CHAPTER FOUR

FOUNDATIONS

Theological Foundations

“To know God is to do justice; to love Yahweh is to do justice to the poor and oppressed.”¹

These musings with the two theological presuppositions upon which all of my theology is based. The God we encounter in scripture, and the God that has been revealed to me through my own lived experience is a God of justice, and a God of love. All that proceeds from this point forward must be reconciled with those two foundational premises.

If theology is simply what we say about God, then let me be very clear up front: whatever I say about God will not conflict with the notion that God demands justice and God is love. These two primary characteristics come together in the heart of God in a way that direct the actions of those who would follow God. Which is to say that love cannot be whole without justice, and justice cannot be practiced without love. The former can allow God’s children to satisfy themselves with whatever passes for contentment in any given age or within any given culture, while the latter is prone to creating an anger, a hatred, and a thirst for retribution that is more destructive of

¹ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York, NY: Orbis Press, 1986), 14.

community that it is constitutive. Neither option alone is consistent with God's vision of Shalom.

Having set the foundation of a theological perspective, I can proceed to talk about the relevant historical roots of such a theology, especially as it applies to the chosen topic: white racism and white privilege. Along the rather circuitous route I have taken on this journey towards an emerging theology, I have stopped along the way to listen to many voices, all of which have influenced and affected me deeply. Among the voices who have had the most profound impact upon me are James Cone, Jürgen Moltman, Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, Letty Russell, Gustavo Guitierrez, Doug Meeks, and too recently to have processed deeply but certainly soon to be of greater import, Andrew Sung Park. Whether I quote them directly or not, you need to know that these – and to be sure many other – men and women are woven into the very fabric of the pages that follow. I have read and reread their works many times, and their influence upon my theology is unmistakable, if not always directly discernable.

Let me begin with a quote from Gustavo Guitierrez. "In our approach," he writes, "to critically reflect on the praxis of liberation, in its deepest dimension, is not to 'limp after' reality. The present in the praxis of liberation, in its deepest dimension, is pregnant with the future; hope must be an inherent part of our present commitment in history."² This is an important and indispensable notion for me, and so much is said in that brief thought. Of utmost importance is the notion of hope: if we cannot proceed from this moment with hope; if we cannot see pregnant in even the most horrific of evils a future of hope, then nothing important can be said and nothing of significance

² Ibid., 14.

can be done – at least until such time as that hope can be seen, felt, heard, and found. It becomes too easy today to be overwhelmed by the tasks of overcoming injustice and effecting liberation on behalf of the oppressed. The lack of hope produces an ennui and apathy that simply accepts that what is will be. The white community, for its own sake and for the restoration of its soul-respite, can ill afford to live without the hope that its own white power, white privilege, and white racism can be overcome.

But hear also in the voice of Gustavo another important understanding. Hope is pregnant in the present only in what he refers to as the “praxis of liberation.” Like many liberation theologians, he has grown weary of academic pursuits of what he calls wisdom and rational knowledge. It is not that these pursuits are without merit. He writes: “The critical function of theology necessarily leads to redefinition of these other two tasks. Henceforth, wisdom and rational knowledge will more explicitly have ecclesiastical praxis as their point of departure and their context.”³ In other words, the words themselves that reflect no more than wisdom and rational thought lose their import and impact. The only true wisdom worth speaking of is that wisdom that comes from the heart of an ecclesiastical community that has engaged itself in the work of justice and liberation.

The purpose of this type of theology is *praxis*, action that is concurrent with reflection or analysis and leads to new questions, actions, and reflections. In this format theology flows out of and into action. It is a tool for doing something that can become a catalyst for change among those who believe in the Biblical promises for the oppressed.⁴

³ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴ Letty M. Russell, *Human Liberation in a Feminist Perspective – A Theology* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1974), 55.

This is a very important point, and one imminently relevant to the work that the white church must now engage itself in as it seeks to overcome its own legacy of race hatred and white privilege. It is not enough to speak about justice and love. It is not enough to rationalize a need for reform in the church. It is not enough to hear articulated a call to justice, liberation, tolerance, etc. The church's rhetoric and theology lose their power and pregnancy when the work of either the pulpit or the pen is not borne of the work of the hand and the foot and the heart.

This is an essential critique of traditional, white theologies: they have remained largely the work of the mind, products of academia that stimulate thought and challenge the brain, but do not necessarily inspire action. And it is not simply that they do not inspire action, but more to the point they are not borne of action – or praxis, to use the language of Guitierrez.

Andrew Sung Park raises a similar point in his book *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin*. He writes:

The church has developed the doctrine of sin and other related theological ideas with the sinner, but not the victim of sin, in mind. . . . To bring good news to the poor and the downtrodden, we need to develop a proper analysis of the problems of the world viewed from the perspectives of both the sinner and the victim. . . . The present state of theological discussion needs such an overhaul in favor of the oppressed.⁵

Later in his book he writes:

We have discussed the process of *understanding* and *envisagement* as necessary steps for the resolution of Han. *Understanding* is compassion and *envisagement* is hope. By themselves they are not

⁵ Andrew Sung Park, *The Wounded Heart of God: The Asian Concept of Han and the Christian Doctrine of Sin* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 13.

enough to dissolve han. The two must meet in the *engagement* of action, which is faith.⁶

The engagement of action: like Guitierrez, Park argues that the academic world of the white theologians is not the place from which words and truths about God should be uttered. Themselves the natural byproduct of white domination, power, and privilege, such theologies will always be suspect. What we see, what we say, and what we believe to be true about God all change when we both view such revelations from the point of view of the oppressed and downtrodden, and when we engage ourselves in the kinds of meaningful actions that seek to bring an end to systems of oppression and injustice.

If, as I insist, no theology is complete without the fundamental notions that justice and love lie at the heart of God; and if, as Guittierrez suggests, no theology is complete without praxis as both proximate cause and essential effect, then it must be argued that the God who is justice and who is love is best discovered in actions that are meant to “preach good news to the poor, . . . proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed,” (Lk: 4-18); or to “scatter the proud in the imagination of the hearts, put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalt those of low degree; fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich empty away!” (Lk. 1:51-53).

It is in the midst of such revolutionary action that we speak our resounding NO! to the world and its powers, and our faithful YES! to God. But more importantly, it is in the midst of such action that God is discovered. Jesus himself said: “As you did it to one of the least of these, you did it to me,” (Mt. 25:40). This being the case, any

⁶ Ibid., 170–171.

theology that is not born in the crucible of justice and love on behalf of “the least of my children” will always be lacking something essential. For it is, and always has been, the prerogative of God to dwell in a special way with the downtrodden and oppressed: “I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmaster; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver them,” (Ex. 3:7-8).

Liberation theologians have always recognized this truth, describing what has been called God’s preferential option for the poor. In the Gospel of Matthew, the 11th chapter, Jesus encounters some disciples of John. John was in prison and had heard new of Jesus. He wanted to know if he was the one who was to come, or should they be looking for another. We must understand at this point that this is, for all of us, the central question of faith. Is Jesus the one? The answer is important. Jesus does not say definitively yes or no, but gives this rather enigmatic reply. “Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them,” (Mt. 11:4-5).

Jesus’ claim to legitimacy, and the only sign he could point to establish that legitimacy, was the work he was doing on behalf of the oppressed, the downtrodden, the marginalized, and the poor. The implication here is so strong, and yet so often missed by white theologians: if the good news is not preached to the poor, then those who are preaching are not from God. Is it any wonder that he follows that declarative statement with the announcement that “Blessed is the one who takes no offense at me,” (Mt. 11:6).

The problem with most of our theology today is that we have sanitized God and Jesus, making them into something that white people can stomach. Gone are the references to setting free the captive and feeding the hungry and sending the rich empty away and preaching good news to the poor. In their absence are the creation of a blue-eyed, blond-haired personal Lord and Savior and a God who is asked much more often to bless America than to free the oppressed.

The blond-haired, blue-eyed white man has taught you and me to worship a white Jesus, and to shout and sing and pray to this God that's his God, the white man's God. The white man has taught us to shout and sing and pray until we die, to wait until death, for some dreamy heaven-in-the-hereafter, when we're dead, while this white man has his milk and honey in the streets paved with golden dollars here on this earth!⁷

It needs to be said very clearly that theologies that allow white people to live as they do with no regard for the poor, with no regard for people of color, with no desire to set captives free, with no regard for the ways in which white power and privilege sustain systemic injustices to which both God and Jesus stand in radical opposition can no longer be accepted. Greg Riley, speaking of the people of the early church, writes:

Health, wealth, and success in the world of money and business and politics were out of reach of the vast majority of people and were understood to be dangers to the health of the soul. We have lost something important. Today we worship the rich and famous, but they seldom do anything worth imitating in the moral and real human sense; they seldom risk their precious posteriors for anything.⁸

⁷ Malcom X, quoted in a book by Jay Davis, *Songs of Wisdom*, ed. Jay Davis (New York, NY: Bill Adler Books, Inc., 2000), 80-81.

⁸ Gregory J. Riley, *One Jesus, Many Christs: How Jesus Inspired not One True Christianity, but Many* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1997), 209.

This is what theology has become for us: the creation of a God that lets us get rich and famous without doing anything, save give ourselves over to our personal Lord and savior, Jesus Christ.

The whiteness of the God of the white people must be challenged. The richness of the God of the rich white people must be challenged. The personal savior of the free and independent white people must be challenged. "As organized American religion oscillates between silence and ineffective murmuration on the vital social matters of our time, it is a puzzlement that troubled whites find anything at all helpful in their church."⁹

The voices of those who have spoken about a God of justice for the poor, about a God of love for the poor, about a God of hope for the poor must be heard. "If the nation (white America) looks for a way of life that is keyed to survival it will find the *black morality*;"¹⁰ "Liberation theologies, including feminist theologies, are particularly important to the life and health of the church;"¹¹ "theology of liberation offers us not so much a new theme for reflection as a *new way* to do theology."¹² The voices of liberation theologians, those who do theology a new way, involving their praxis in theology and evolving their theology from praxis, are the relevant voices of our time. They remind us of the central roles of justice, love, and hope in any theology.

⁹ William H. Grier and Price M. Cobbs, *The Jesus Bag* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1971), 156.

¹⁰ Ibid., 178.

¹¹ Russell, *Human Liberation*, 70.

¹² Guitierrez, *Theology of Liberation*, 15.

Under different circumstances, the author would spend more time with each of them. But his subject matter compels him to be particularly concerned about what W. E. B. DuBois called the problem of the color line. It is important to see how in particular Black Theology speaks to those who grew up in the white church and who have visions, images, and concepts of God, of Jesus, and of the church shaped exclusively by white theologians. It is time to discover the voices of those who wish to topple from its throne the might of white power and white privilege, and the God the white church has created to sit upon that throne.

“The concept of ‘race’ has undergirded a belief system that has made it impossible for churches to move into koinonia communion. . . . Christian racism has prevailed as an organizing principle of church life.”¹³

“Awareness of racism as a problem of religious identity, and not just a societal one, is the first step toward engaging it theologically.”¹⁴

There are to-day no truer exponents of the pure human spirit of the Declaration of Independence than the American Negroes; there is no true American music but the wild sweet melodies of the Negro slave; the American fairy tales and folk-lore are Indian and African; and, all in all, we black men seem the *sole oasis of simple faith and reverence* in a dusty desert of dollars and smartness.¹⁵

It is part of the wisdom of the Judeo-Christian ethic that all are enjoined to love God and to love one another. However ardently a man may hold to this attitude, his commitment is nevertheless threatened by the reality that he still will admit categories of

¹³ Rena Karefa-Smart, “A Call to Move Beyond the Heritage of Christian Racism,” in *Ending Racism in the Church*, ed. Susan Davies and Sister Paul Teresa Hennessee, S.A. (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998), 110 & 112.

¹⁴ James Cone, “Theology’s Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy,” speech delivered at the campus of Birmingham Southern University for the “Reframing the Dialogue on Race” conference, Feb., 2001, 6.

¹⁵ W. E. B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, 1961), 22.

exception and extenuating circumstances which amend and sometimes nullify his respect for human life.¹⁶

“Why has the church been such a tragic witness to its own Gospel?”¹⁷

“No one can say that Christianity has failed. It has never been tried.”¹⁸

Biblical Foundations

I think that, by and large, the predominant white culture lives in denial about its race hatred, prejudice, an bigotry; lives in denial about the extent of its own white privilege and power; lives in denial about its possessive investment in whiteness; and lives in denial about an ingrained, systemic injustice from which they benefit greatly about which they do very little. It is my suspicion that the cost of maintaining this injustice is high. A festering wound in the souls of whites in this culture has been opened, and the pain from this wound to our souls and our psyches is great. In an article entitled *The Banality of Evil*, Poteat refers to a demonic despair that is inherent in western civilization, that is to say “despair that is deliberately secret and conceals itself.”¹⁹ He goes on to point out that this demonic despair “is the fiercely reticent spiritual refusal to be spirit.”²⁰

¹⁶ Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness* (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1965), 2.

¹⁷ Ibid., 107.

¹⁸ Adam Clayton Powell, quoted in a book edited by Jay Davis, *Songs of Wisdom*, ed. Jay Davis (New York, NY: William and Morrow Company, Inc., 2000), 80.

¹⁹ William H. Poteat, “The Banality of Evil”, a lecture delivered at the Fifth Annual Loy H. Witherspoon Lecture in Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Nov. 13, 1998, 11.

²⁰ Ibid.

This is what Poteat sees as indicative of a banality of evil that has come to characterize white, western culture. Believing that at our core we are deeply spiritual beings, what we have come to realize is that we have not fed that spirit. Our great sin is *acedia*, one of the seven Patristic deadly sins which Protestants have come to understand as sloth—the sin of being lazy. That is not how it was originally meant to be understood. In its original meaning, the sin referred instead to “our refusal to be before the transcendent Spirit the spirit that we are.”²¹ We have paid a great spiritual price, and this has taken a great toll on all of us, white and black alike.

We delude ourselves as whites in America, and we do so at two foundational, fundamental levels. First, we buy into the rhetoric and the marketing strategies of corporate America, believing that the more we own, and the more we buy, and the more we consume the happier we will be. This in and of itself makes the soul restless, and the spirit hunger for the things material possessions cannot provide. We exchange the truth for a lie, spending lives for that which is not bread.

And more to the point here, we grow to like both the luxuries that this gospel affords us, and the power that accompanies it. Our passion for justice is tempered by our desire to have more. The soul and the spirit are left festering and unfed as we look for solace in a balm that will not heal. Then when black America calls out for justice and equality, we discover that we will go only as far as the consumer gospel will let us. We bow to an altar other than the one offered to us by our Christian faith.

The second delusion occurs when we tell ourselves that we have already fought for and won the liberation of the black in America. This piece of our story portrays whites as magnanimous heroes in a struggle for racial equality. It ended with the civil

²¹ Ibid.

rights movement. It sees in affirmative action legislation a tipping of the scales in favor of undeserving blacks. In some places, the white man sees himself now as the most persecuted segment of the American population. Blacks who continue to cry out for justice are looked at with scorn for not appreciating all that the white man has already done for him.

These beliefs disclose levels of denial that will only exacerbate the wound of the soul and the hunger of the spirit. We deny the reality that we have left the struggle for racial justice and equality long before it has been achieved. We deny that we have failed to achieve an equitable distribution of wealth and power. We deny that there is a wound in the soul of the white America. We deny that our spirit is well-fed. We have healed the wound of our people lightly.

I believe that white America today must come face to face with the truth about itself. This is as much a matter of health, hope, and happiness as it is a matter of justice, liberation, and equality. We are suffering from a wound in the soul and spirit that needs a lasting balm, a lingering peace, and a respite that will come only when we exchange the lie for the truth; only when we spend our lives for that which is bread and the spirit can be fed; only when we heal the wound completely.

I have alluded to three passages from scripture that I think speak to this condition of the American white culture: spirit refusing to be spirit. But first I want to spend a little time with what is, I believe, one of the most foundational passages in all of scripture: Psalm 82.

The author of this psalm takes us to the very courtroom of the heavens in a sort of fantasy that is played out before the gods. Arrayed in the courtroom are all those

who claim to be gods. There is no monotheism present in this text making judgments about whether or not such gods exist: rather, there is a challenge present meant to discern once and for all which among these gods deserves the right to be called God, and why.

The opening verse is prelude to what will come: “God has taken God’s place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods God hold judgment,” (Ps. 82:1). This is a showdown, a legal confrontation in which arguments will be made, defenses sustained, strategies employed, and decisions handed down. At the end of the day, it will be determined who will reign in the heavens.

But even the grammar in this opening verse foreshadows what is to come. It is God who resides. It is God who will give judgment. God is the subject of all verbs, and the only actor in this drama. Others may be present, but they are ignored in this opening verse. And in the end, only one voice will speak: all others are silent. All others will be subject to this one’s stated opinions. All others will submit to this one’s authority.

But much more is being said here than that. It is not enough for the Psalmist to proclaim, as many have before, that this God reigns. The point of this drama is not merely to remind us that if God were to engage in battle before any others vying for the throne God would win even before the others speak. We must also be reminded in this moment why God is God and the others are not. And it is not about power, or omniscience, or dominion, or even wisdom. There is something inherent in this God that puts all others to shame. It is nothing short of this God’s *sine qua non*. It is that

which, when placed in evidence, silences all others and gives this one the right to take the throne and make mere mortals of the others.

And what is this indispensable characteristic? It is justice.

“How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?” (Ps. 82:2). This is offered as indictment. What follows is polemic: “Give justice to the weak and fatherless; maintain the rights of the afflicted and destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy,” (Ps. 82:3). Following both is the final judgment: “They have neither knowledge nor understanding, they walk about in darkness. I say, ‘You are gods, sons of the Most High all of you,’” (Ps. 82:5-6). And after such a judgment comes the sentence: “Nevertheless, you shall die like mortals; you will fall like any prince,” (Ps. 82:7). Such is the end for those who claim power, but cannot use it for justice to the poor, the oppressed, the needy, and the weak. It is nothing short of a death sentence, so profoundly wanting are they in that which makes for a god. Put simply, because God is just, God is God and God alone.

As this drama closes, the psalmist cannot help but interject his or her own voice. It is the voice of supplication: “Rise up, O God, judge the earth, for all the nations are your inheritance,” (Ps. 82:8). The prayer betrays a hidden pain, a residing knowledge of an injustice left unattended. This psalm is birthed in the fertile imagination of one who has known great pain, and who now understands that his or her only hope is in the God who cannot help but bring justice. It stands as a testimony of faith. It is the same faith of which Howard Thurman writes when he describes the voice of the negro who sang with his brothers and sisters in bondage, and yet believed. He writes:

There is a bottomless resourcefulness in man that ultimately enables him to transform ‘the spear of frustration into a shaft of

light.’ Under circumstances even one’s deepest distress becomes so sanctified that a vast illumination points the way to the land one seeks. This is the God in man: because of it, man stands in immediate candidacy of the power to absorb all the pain of life without destroying his joy. He who has made that discovery knows at last that he can stand anything that can happen to him. ‘The blind man stood by the road and he cried’—the answer came in the cry itself. What a panorama of the ultimate dignity of the human spirit.²²

Like the slave who found a way to sing God praises and cry out for justice, so too does the Psalmist. Both are aware in their bones that God is God because God is just. Faith in such a God is not ill-placed. Justice is the reason God is God, and not someone else. Theologians that assign other matters of attention and import to God only offer a bread that will not feed, a peace that will not comfort, and a faith that cannot sustain. They exchange the truth of God for a lie.

I have found three passages that will serve as my biblical foundations. I believe that respite for the soul and spirit will only come when white folk speak the truth about white power, privilege, and supremacy, and speak it in love. I believe that the journey of a thousand miles (and we have that far and farther to go) begins with a single step. In some ways, I see this whole effort on mine at this point as my single step – to be followed again by countless others.

The first passage I turn to is from Isaiah. It asks a haunting question: “Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (Is. 55:2).

Our souls long for the taste of that which is bread. Our restless spirit, underfed as the body continues its own pursuit of endless consumption, is left hungering. And

²² Howard Thurman, *Deep River and the Negro Spiritual Speaks of Life and Death* (Richmond, VA: Friends United Press, 1975), 39 – 40.

above the din of this culture bent on banality, beyond the chaos of a people fraught with tension, and beneath the layers of a pain hidden deep within the soul comes the voice of the prophet with an invitation: “Harken diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in fatness,” (Is. 55:2).

This is little to ask of a people who will sacrifice so much more in order to maintain an injustice that is destroying their soul. This is little to ask of a people who waste their lives pursuing something that cannot feed the spirit. It is a moment of invitation that is offered to those whose passions and energies and resources have been spent for that which the grave cannot receive and the stomach cannot digest. White America has fed for too long at the trough of emptiness, and left little for anyone else. And after all that, they want more. As long as we continue to desire that which cannot sustain us, our appetites will remain insatiable. We will continue to gorge ourselves on the world’s precious resources, feeling ever more desperate as the pain within us lingers. And all the while, the voice of God is not heeded. The invitation is not honored: “Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy?” (Is. 55: 1-2).

If Isaiah reminds us that we eat a food which is not food, then in the same way does Jeremiah tell us that we have settled for a justice that is not justice: “They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying ‘Peace, Peace,’ when there is no peace,” (Jer. 8:11). This is the expressed anguish and anger of a God who knows that the children of time and creation are hurting: the oppressed as well as the oppressor.

Oppressors fail to see the immense wounds they inflict on themselves and their progeny when they fail to act justly. When one understands that justice lies at the heart of the God who created us, this will become apparent. But oppressors do not speak of God that way. They create theologies that make God a protector of the powerful. God is the one who maintains the systems that dominate. God is the one who blesses the wealthy, sustains the powerful, and rewards the righteous. Those who are wealthy are blessed. Those who have the rewards are righteous. Wealth and power become their own justification before this God.

There is a damning corollary in this theology. Those who are not wealthy are not blessed. Those who have no rewards are not righteous. And oppression is in many ways seen as the right of those in power, and the prerogative of those who can maintain it.

I know that the reading of this text from Jeremiah more often than not is meant to remind us that the deep wounds of the oppressed have not been healed. The work to make all whole was cut short, as if the wound being treated was not serious. I know the obvious parallel here to the work that white America did to heal the sin of racism, slavery, bigotry, white supremacy, white skin privilege, and white power. It is a wound we healed lightly, if at all. We cry peace, but there is no peace.

I do not want in any way to deny that when I suggest that the wound of the oppressed is not the only one that was not properly treated. There is a festering wound in the body, soul, and spirit of the white oppressor that has also been treated lightly. The wound talked about here is as much the one found in those who believe that

wealth, power, and might have filled their empty hearts, their sin-sick soul, and their empty spirit.

At fault here are the false prophets who write the theology of the throne, who preach the gospel of the empire, and who create a God who sanctions it all. More pain is coming for both the oppressed and the oppressor. Both wounds linger. Neither has been treated properly.

White America has manifested the destiny to which their god has called them. They believe that as long as they maintain their power and wealth, there can be but one conclusion: there all-powerful god would have it no other way. And this has become their burden. This has become their pain. White privilege affords wealth , but not health. It provides riches but not rest. It feeds an insatiable appetite, but not the soul. At some deep, foundational level we know this. There is a longing for something of substance, for something that will heal.

It is time for the true prophet to speak with the voice of an empathetic God and remind us that our wound is not healed. It is time for the prophets among us to tell us that the peace we have settled for is no peace. It is time for the prophets among us to make it clear that there will be no rest until we rest in God. The prophet must be diligent, for the people have heard the voices of those crying peace: there is no peace. That is a lie.

Joel Kovel may be one of those prophets. In his book *White Racism: A Psychohistory*, he writes: "Our culture is markedly less virtuous than ideology would have it. Our ideals are nourished by corrupt roots and survive by a continuously

sustained act of self-deception.”²³ Later in the same book he writes: “There are several races in America, but only one American culture; and that culture, the fruit of our history, generates racism for the benefit of a false whiteness.”²⁴

Jeremiah reminds us of a peace that is no peace, and Isaiah of a bread that is no bread. Paul writes the same truth this way: “They have exchanged the truth about God for a lie,” (Rom. 1:25). Kovel describes America sustained by self-deception which generates racism for the benefit of a false whiteness. There is no white. There is no black. It is in itself a deception that feeds the mouth of an all-consuming beast. We lie to ourselves about what it means to be white and what it means to be black. We lie to ourselves about how power should be distributed and allocated based on the color of skin. We lie to ourselves about how we are satisfied with the products we consume.

We live in great denial. Truths are exchanged for lies. A peace is settled for long before any peace has been found. Bread is eaten that does not sustain. And we are suffering for it. White pain may not be the pain of those who are the victims of their insatiable appetites, and it would be unfair and unwise to offer that suggestion. But it is a real and abiding pain nonetheless. To deny that pain will be costly. To accept remedies that provide only the appearance of a healing will never satisfy.

God’s invitation is to drink from the fountain of living water and to eat without price the bread of life. God’s invitation is to receive a peace that will bring solace and comfort. God’s invitation is to exchange the lie for the truth. What this project is about is nothing short of that: a first step toward receiving with joy this invitation to be fed, to be at peace, and to live once again with truth on our side.

²³ Joel Kovel, *White Racism: A Psychohistory* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1970), 4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 246.

Historical Foundations

As one imagining the ways in which the white church can reframe its dialogue on racism, the author is dependent on many who have come before him. There is in fact a rich array of men and women whose voices have spoken clearly for, whose actions have attempted to courageously establish, and whose passion was spent unflaggingly in support of racial justice and equality. He admires them all. They are heroes. And they will serve as the pillars upon which the historical foundation in this effort will be built.

He must confess at the outset: historical research within the church relative to the issue of racial justice and equality is much more replete with examples of those who got it wrong than those who got it right. The author is the product of a white church that is itself largely the product of a white culture. He is searching for examples from within that church and that culture that give him a foundation upon which to do his work here as an engaged participant in the effort to reframe the dialogue on racism. He has found them and is grateful for them. Many of them are products of the same church and culture; others are the victims—and their voices are just as, if not more, important to him. But they are all, to a certain extent, marginalized men and women. They broke from the established norm in an effort to say things and see things differently.

They are mentioned so that as support is drawn from them; as their story is remembered and told; as a foundation is built upon their work, their word, and their memory: what is avoided is the impression that theirs is the only story being told. The truth is, other historians and story-tellers listen to different voices. Not only that, they speak differently about the men and women the author chooses to rely on, seeing them not as heroes but as agitators; not as voices of reason but as voices of disturbance or

insanity; not as establishers of justice but as fomenters of treason and sabotage. Those in power afford themselves the luxury of telling the stories that shape us as a culture. They get to speak about the men and women of our past in ways that help define who we are, what we will tolerate, and what we can become.

The author did not grow up in a house that told the stories of these men and women. He did not grow up in a culture that told the stories of these men and women. He did not grow up in a church that told the stories of these men and women. Reframing the dialogue on racism begins with a number of important steps, and one of them is surely discovering these voices buried in our past. This culture must begin to tell a different story about who we are, who they were, and who we can become. Choosing to rely on these men and women; choosing to hear their voices; choosing to tell their stories is a radical departure from the home, the culture, and the church of his younger days. It is an intentional move on his part, and—he believes—an indispensable one. And while he does not wish to give the impression that the white home, culture, and church in which he grew up is best characterized and represented by the voices you are about to hear, he does want to say that the work that he wishes to be about is.

One can dare to imagine that the church can become a refuge for the weak and the oppressed, the marginalized and the poor, the white man humbled and stripped of the power that he has lorded over others, and the black woman victimized and abused because of her race and her gender. And one can dare to dream this because one can be inspired by those who have come before whose voices resounded with courageous cries for justice; whose lives have become an example to many of how to live justly; whose blood has been shed in order to make life better for those who would follow; and whose

passion for what was possible would not be compromised by what others believed was probable. Surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, how can one not dare to dream?

Anthony Benezet, an eighteenth century Quaker and contemporary of Thomas Jefferson and the founding fathers (who made slavery a part of the white American landscape), was as ardent and outspoken an abolitionist as white America knew it his day. He and John Woolman, another Quaker contemporary, have been called “abolitionist movements unto themselves.”²⁵ He spent his life teaching, writing, and preaching against slavery and the slave trade. He knew that slavery was an horrendous and mighty evil, and he was tireless in his efforts to bring it to an end. And while his rhetoric was not intended solely for the ears of Christian men and women, his deepest anger was in fact directed right at them. There is no doubt in his mind that those who called themselves children of God and followers of the Christ should have known better than to enslave another human being. A special kind of judgment awaited them:

May I speak plainly to you? I must. Love constrains me: Love to you, as well, as those you are concerned with. Is there a God? You know there is. Is he a just God? Then there must be a state of retribution: a state wherein the just God will reward every man according to his work. Then what reward will he render to man you. O think betimes! Before you drop in eternity: Think how, “He shall have judgment without mercy, that shewed no mercy.” Are you a man? Then you should have a human heart. But have you indeed? What is your heart made of? Is there no such principle as compassion there? Do you never feel another’s pain? Have you no sympathy? No sense of human woe? No pity for the miserable? . . . If you do not, you must go on, till the measure of your iniquities is full. Then will the great God deal with you, as you have dealt with them, and require all their blood at your hands. . . . To-day resolve, God being your helper to escape for your life—Regard no money: All that a man hath will he give for his life. Whatever you lose, lose not your Soul; nothing can countervail

²⁵ Osofsky, *Burden*, 44.

that loss. Immediately quit the horrid trade: At all events be an honest man.²⁶

In the early nineteenth century another courageous and unyielding voice appeared on the scene, an undeterred evangelist of abolition: Theodore Dwight Weld. Preaching in revival fashion throughout the North, he won over countless converts to his particular brand of Christianity, one that demanded justice for the slave. In his book *The Bible Against Slavery*, he expounds at great length how the “spirit of slavery” seeks to find refuge in sacred scripture, but will never be successful. His words decrying the racist’s defense of slavery with certain passages from the Bible are as clear and unequivocal as any ever written. He writes:

It (the spirit of slavery) courses up and down the Bible, “seeking rest, and finding none.” THE LAW OF LOVE, glowing on every page, flashes around it an omnipresent anguish and despair. It shrinks from the hated light, and howls under the consuming touch, as demons quailed before the Son of God, and shrieked, “Torment us not.” At last, it slinks away under the types of the Mosaic system, and seeks to burrow out of sight among their shadows. Vain hope! Its asylum is its sepulcher; its city of refuge the city of destruction. It flies from the light into the sun; from heat, into devouring fire; and from the voice of God into the thickest of His thunders.²⁷

A partner of Weld’s in this passion for justice, human rights, and abolition was none other than Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* put the issue of freedom for the slave on the front burner for some time to come, becoming a best seller and eventually a much attended play in the urban centers of the North. The daughter of an abolitionist preacher, and the sister of a couple others, she became herself an outspoken

²⁶ Anthony Benezet, “A Quakers Observation on Slavery,” in Osofsky, *Burden*, 47.

²⁷ Theodore Dwight Weld, “The Bible Against Slavery: An Inquiry into the Patriarchal and Mosaic Systems on the Subject of Human Rights,” in Osofsky, *Burden*, 87.

critic of slavery. After the conclusion of the novel, in her closing remarks to the readers, she betrays her own strong passions:

O Church of Christ, read the signs of the times! . . . Who may abide the day of his appearing? "For that day shall burn as an oven: and he shall appear as a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow and the fatherless, and that *turn aside the stranger in his right*: and he shall break in pieces the oppressor." Are not these the words for a nation bearing in her bosom so mighty an injustice? Christians! Every time that you pray that the Kingdom of Christ may come, can you forget that prophecy associates in dread fellowship. The day of vengeance with the year of his redeemed? The Christian church has a heavy account to answer. Not by combining together, to protect injustice and cruelty, and making a common capitol of sin, is this Union to be saved, - but by repentance, justice, and mercy; for, not surer is the eternal law by which the mill-stone sinks in the ocean, than the stronger law by which injustice and cruelty shall bring on nations the wrath of Almighty God!²⁸

One of America's most zealous abolitionists was the uncompromising William Lloyd Garrison. While some, like his colleague Charles Sumner would equivocate their abolitionist tendencies based on the political climate and what they believed to be possible at the time—given the tenor of general public—William remained throughout his life a thorn in the side of every slave advocate in the country and around the globe. As a young man of thirteen, he apprenticed for the editor of a local newspaper, for whom John Greenleaf Whittier (called by many the poet laureate of abolition) wrote on a regular basis. Already himself opposed to slavery, William was deeply influenced by his time with the paper. He would eventually himself found *The Liberator*, nothing more than a tool he used to publish his radical teachings. He was sued for libel by the owner of a slave ship, calling him in his paper a highway robber and a murderer: Garrison was jailed for six months for this offense.

²⁸ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin*, (New York, NY: Paul S. Ericsson, Inc., 1964), 560-561.

His first issue left no doubt as to the intent of the paper:

I am aware that many object to the severity of my language, but is there not cause for severity? I will be harsh as the truth, and as uncompromising as justice. On this subject, I do not wish to think, or speak, or write, with moderation. No! No! Tell a man whose house is on fire to sound a moderate alarm. . . . but urge me not to use moderation in a cause like the present. . . . I am in earnest--I will not equivocate--I will not excuse--I will not retreat a single inch--AND I WILL BE HEARD.²⁹

In Columbia, South Carolina, a Vigilance Committee offered a \$1,500 reward for the arrest of anyone distributing copies of *The Liberator*, and none other than the Georgia House of Representatives offered \$5,000 for Garrison's capture and trial.

In 1833 he helped Prudence Crandall open up a school for black girls in Boston. It was at this juncture that pro-slavery forces in the area made threats to capture him and bring him to Georgia for the \$5,000 reward money. Leaving for the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, Garrison barely avoided capture by the Sheriff while boarding the ship. On his return, he was caught and dragged through the streets of Boston with a rope around his neck. In order to save his life, the mayor intervened, and jailed him for disturbing the peace. On his jail cell wall he scrawled these words: *William Lloyd Garrison was put into this cell Wednesday afternoon, October 21, 1835, to save him from the violence of a 'respectable and influential' mob, who sought to destroy him for preaching the abominable and dangerous doctrine that "all men are created equal."*

In 1854, Garrison delivered a fiery speech, portions of which I quote here:

I cannot but regard oppression in every form--and most of all, that which turns a man into a thing--with indignation and abhorrence. . . . Those who ask me to be dumb on the subject of slavery ask me to give the lie to my professions, to degrade my manhood, and to stain my soul. I will not be a liar, a poltroon, or a hypocrite, to accommodate any party, to gratify any sect, to escape

²⁹ William Lloyd Garrison, From *The Liberator*, first issue, published January 1, 1831 in Boston.

any odium or peril, or to preserve any institution. . . . My fanaticism is that I insist on the American people abolishing slavery or ceasing to prate of the rights of man. . . . The abolitionism which I advocate is as absolute as the law of God. It admits no compromise. Every slave is a stolen man; every slaveholder is a man stealer.

These are solemn times. It is not a struggle for national salvation; for the nation, as such, seems doomed beyond recovery.

What, then, is to be done? Friends of the slave, the question is not whether by our efforts we can abolish slavery, speedily or remotely—for duty is ours, the result is with God; but whether we will go with the multitude to do evil, sell our birthright for a mess of pottage, cease to cry aloud and spare not, and remain in Babylon when the command of God is “Come out of her, my people.”

Living or dying, defeated or victorious, be it ours to exclaim, “No compromise with slavery! Liberty with each, for all, forever! Man above all institutions! The supremacy of God over the whole earth!”³⁰

While both still young men, Whittier wrote in the pen of the great poet, “To William Lloyd Garrison.” The opening lines read as follows:

Champion of those who groan beneath
 Oppression’s iron hand:
 In view of penury, hate, and death,
 I see thee fearless stand.
 Still bearing up thy lofty brow,
 In the steadfast strength of thy truth,
 In manhood sealing well the vow
 And promise of thy youth.

Go on, for thou hast chosen well;
 On in the strength of God!
 Long as one human heart shall swell
 Beneath the tyrant’s rod.
 Speak in a slumbering nation’s ear,
 As thou hast ever spoken,
 Until the dead in sin shall hear,
 The fetter’s link be broken!²⁷

³⁰ William Lloyd Garrison, from a speech delivered in 1854, found on-line at <http://members.aol.com/jfepperson/garrison.html>. (18 January 2003).

²⁷ John Greenleaf Whittier, from his poem “To William Lloyd Garrison” in *The Chief American Poets*, ed. Curtis Hidden Page (New York, NY: Appleton & Co., 1905), 260.

Whittier would go on to right an extensive library of poetry that championed the cause of abolition, upheld the dignity of the slave, and honored the men and women who gave their life in the cause of freedom. I could choose from a great number of his poems to demonstrate here his own commitment to the cause of justice, but I choose this one because of the strong language he uses to mock a church that, like many before and since, Whittier saw as having compromised away its own integrity, choosing expediency over the visible cause of justice. The poem I choose is entitled “The Christian Slave.” Even in the title is the mockery begun, his not so subtle sarcasm ringing through.

A Christian! Going, gone!
 Who bids for God’s own image? for his grace,
 Which that poor victim of the market-place
 Hath in her suffering won?

My God! Can such things be/
 Hast thou not said that whatsoe’er is done
 Unto thy weakest and humblest one
 Is even done to thee?

In that sad victim, then,
 Child of pitying love, I see Thee stand;
 Once more the jest-word of a mocking band,
 Bound, sold, and scourged again!

A Christian up for sale!
 Wet with her blood your whips, o’ertask her frame,
 Make her life loathsome with your wrong and shame,
 Her patience shall not fail!

A heathen hand might deal
 Back on your heads the gathered wrong of years
 But her low, broken prayer and nightly tears
 Ye neither heed nor feel.

Con well thy lesson o’er,
 Thou prudent teacher, tell the toiling slave

No dangerous tale of Him who came to save
The outcast and the poor.

But wisely shut the ray
Of God's free gospel from her simple heart,
And to her darkened mind alone impart
One stern command, Obey!

So shalt thou deftly raise
The market price of human flesh; and while
On thee, their pampered guest, the planters smile,
Thy church shall praise.

Grave, reverend men shall tell
From Northern pulpits how thy work was blest,
While in that vile South Sodom first and best,
Thy poor disciples sell.

Oh, shame! The Moslem thrall,
Who, with his master, to the Prophet kneels,
While turning to the sacred Kebla feels
His fetters break and fall.

Cheers for the turbaned Bey
Of robber-peopled Tunis! he hath torn
The dark slave-dungeons open, and hath borne
Their inmates into day:

But our poor slave in vain
Turns to the Christian shrine his aching eyes;
Its rites will only swell his market price,
And rivet on his chain.

God of all right! How long
Shall priestly robbers at thine altar stand,
Lifting in prayer to Thee the bloody hand
And haughty brow of wrong?

Oh, from the fields of cane,
From the low rice-swamp, from the trader's cell;
From the black slave-ship's foul and loathsome hell,
And coffle's weary chain;

Hoarse, horrible, and strong,
Rises to the Heaven that agonizing cry,
Filling the arches of the hollow sky,

How long, O God, how long?²⁸

Another key figure in the advancement of the cause of justice in white controlled America was the former slave whose sole purpose and singular focus in time came to be the abolishment of lynching. Almost single handedly, Ida B. Wells took up the cause of the slain Negroes who were murdered at the hands of white lawmen and the mobs that more often than not accompanied them. Lynching became a way to assuage the bloodlust of the Southern white mobs that blathered ferociously over the rising tide of the freed Negro's lot in the aftermath of Reconstruction: not, mind you, that the Negro's rights and freedoms were any better protected in the South after Emancipation than they were before.

Ida's close friend, Thomas Moss, was lynched in Memphis in 1892 just for running a better grocery store than his white counterparts. This deeply affected her. Couple that with her disgust at the lack of attention that these murderous events aroused, and Ida became a woman for whom silence and compromise were no longer possible. In a pamphlet she authored entitled "Mob Rule in New Orleans" Ida asked: "Men and women of America, are you proud of this record (of lynching)? Your silence seems to say that you are. Only by earnest, active, united endeavor to arouse public sentiment can we hope to put a stop the these demonstrations of American barbarism." Her life was dedicated to this very effort.

Over the years she would found her own Newspaper in Memphis; bring her petitions not just to the public, but to at least two presidents; visit and interview the families of lynched men, write two books documenting the lynchings, recording their

²⁸ Ibid, 273.

occurrences, dates, circumstances, and victims; found the Negro Fellowship League, a neighborhood center that helped hundreds of poor people in Chicago find jobs; become Chicago's first female probation officer. Her own newspaper office in Memphis was attacked by a white mob and burned, and were she not out of town at the time it is believed that she too would have fallen victim to a lynch mob.

Thanks largely to her own work—at times she was even asked to tone down the rhetoric by some of her black contemporaries—lynching in the United States was almost wiped out by the time of her death in 1931. While it would not be possible, even with her hard work, to calculate either the full number of men violently murdered in this fashion or the cost of damages to the families of the victims; it would be harder still by far to calculate how many lives she saved with her work.

One of the true giants in the struggle to free the black people from the oppression of the white overlords of American culture in the aftermath of the Civil War was W. E. B. Dubois. A product of one of the best educations that the country could offer at the time (a graduate first of Fisk University, and then Harvard), Du Bois became a prolific author, civic organizer, and skilled orator. Unlike his contemporary, Booker T. Washington (who was criticized roundly by many for his concessionary ways, and with whom DuBois carried on a life-long struggle), Du Bois would concede no ground short of full emancipation, franchisement, education, and cultural acceptance for all black men and women.

As a young man walking the streets of Washington, D.C., Du Bois passed the store of a white grocer. Something caught his eye and stopped him short. As he looked in the window of the store more intently, he saw displayed the knuckles of a fellow black

man who had recently been lynched. He vomited and ran home in disgust, vowing never again to temper any of his words, or compromise with any who desired less than complete equality for the black.

In his book *The Souls of Black Folk* he writes with great insight, candor, and passion about the plight of the black people in America, hoping as he does so to exorcise the demons of race hatred and to begin to build a way out for all of his brothers and sisters. Early on in the book he discloses what he calls the “two-ness” of the black in America: “It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity.”²⁹

DuBois founded the Niagara Movement, a collection of black leaders from across the country organized to protest the discrimination rampant in white America in his time. When hotels in the Buffalo, New York area refused to service black men and women, he sent word out to black leaders across the nation to gather in protest. This they did, as twenty-nine of them found rooms in a Canadian Hotel near the Falls of Niagara and formed an alliance to fight racism and discrimination. This meeting was held from July 11-13, 1905 and would be followed the next January by a similar gathering at Harpers Ferry, VA: the sight of John Brown’s failed attempt to capture weapons to arm slaves in a revolt for their freedom. As race riots cropped up around the country, he founded a journal called *The Horizon*, an attempt to publicize the work and views of the Niagara Movement.

In response to the race riots of 1908 in Springfield, Ill.—the birthplace of “The Great Emancipator,” Abraham Lincoln—DuBois called to New York freedom workers of

²⁹ W. E. B. DuBois, *Black Folk*, 16-17.

both the white and black race. This meeting would lay the foundation for what in a few short months would build itself into the NAACP. They would establish *The Crisis Magazine: A Record of the Darker Race* as their publishing arm, and DuBois would become its editor.

He became instrumental in the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s, capturing the attention of and inspiring poets like Claude McKay and Langston Hughes. Before his death in 1967, Hughes would dedicate his poem “The Negro Speaks of Rivers” to DuBois. In it he would write, “My soul has grown deep like the rivers.”³⁰ This is a possible response to DuBois’ own words quoted earlier about the divisive soul of the Black Folk at the turn of the century in America.

If the author were writing of another time and place, he would surely include here the works, writings, and teachings of Mahatma Gandhi. Instead, he wants to write now of one who found in Gandhi an historical pillar of his own, and upon his teachings and philosophies built his own life-work. His name is Howard Thurman, and it was his application of Gandhi’s philosophy of peace and nonviolence in his own ministry that proved to be a valuable resource for the black people of America, and for one of those in particular: Martin Luther King, Jr. Howard was indeed a pillar of the civil rights movement, and a strong influence on many of its early leaders.

Born black and poor in America, Howard struggled to get a strong, foundational education. And get it he did. He left without even the money to buy his train ticket out of town to study at the Florida Baptist Academy, enrolled after there at Morehouse College in Atlanta, from which he graduated in 1923. After much thought, and strongly

³⁰ Langston Hughes, “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” in *The Top 500 Poems*, ed. William Harmon (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992), 1021.

influenced by the religion and philosophy classes he took there, he decided to enter Rochester Theological Seminary. Upon graduation from there in 1926, he married another college graduate—Kate Kelley—and took his first position as Pastor Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Oberlin, Ohio, a town known for its progressive college: Oberlin University. Within a few short years, his beloved wife would die giving birth to their first child, and he would suffer a severe depression. Two years after this, he would remarry. Post-graduate studies at Oberlin and Haverford would present him with greater opportunities, becoming Chaplain at Morehouse College where he would lead daily services; later joining the faculty at Howard University's School of Religion; then dean of Rankin Chapel at Howard.

It was during his tenure at Howard as Dean of Rankin Chapel that he introduced to student body and faculty to an ecumenical religious experience, including the mysticism for which he became known and which he learned under the tutelage of Rufus Jones. His worship services were creative and innovative, and attracted many. It was during this time as well that he began to embrace the principles of nonviolence, even meeting in 1936 with Gandhi himself.

When a student he recommended declined an offer to start an interracial church, Thurman himself took the position and founded the Fellowship of All Peoples—a church that went beyond just black and white, but included various peoples from all races and economic backgrounds. He would offer in worship dance, art, meditation, hand-bells, and a wide variety of other experiences. His ministry served as a direct challenge to the racist practices of the white communities of his time. One member of his church was threatened to be removed from her home by her landlord if she continued to invite people of color

from her church into the home with her. She refused to comply, and Thurmond witnessed some of the worst kind of racial hatred from the community in response to her decision, and to his ministry.

His ministry there caught the eye of the president of Boston University, who offered him the position of Dean of Marsh Chapel, hoping he would create the same kind of ministry on campus as he had in the Fellowship Church in San Francisco. He took it, and in 1953 became the Dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University. While there, he maintained both his commitment to creativity in worship, and to a nonviolent means of ending race hatred and bigotry. He began to take advantage of radio broadcasts, instituted television broadcasts of their services, and as well of conversations with various religious leaders of the time on various subjects. Dance, art, and mysticism continued to remain integral parts of his worship style. After leaving the chapel in 1965, he retired and with his wife moved back to San Francisco and founded the Howard Thurman Educational Trust Fund. He died in 1981, and in 1993 was named by Life Magazine as one of America's 12 greatest preachers. His ministry touched the hearts of many people, both black and white, and he served as an inspiration to many of this country's best and brightest civil rights leaders. He lived a spirit of ecumenism, of racial parity, and of human love unlike any other this land has ever known.

It seems somewhat arbitrary to stop here, and more than that—it seems somewhat inappropriate. Much may have been left out about some of the great men and women of the civil rights movement, as well as some of the great preachers and philosophers of our time. Doing so does not suggest that they have not had a profound impact on the author: indeed they have. But those of whom he would now write have lived, or still live, during

his lifetime: Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, Marian Wright Edelman, James Cone, Cornell West, Randall Bailey, Sharon Harjo, Bernice Powell-Jackson, Mac Charles Jones, and many, many others. All are pillars of faith and prophetic vision, all are bastions of courage and action, and all have laid for him a foundation upon which a structure of love and justice can be built. They will in time serve as historical foundations for generations of others, his own children included. They continue a legacy of race pride and dignity that seeks, and at times achieves, justice for all. He is proud to have had them as strong, influential figures in his life.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE SURVEY

Part I

The actual survey that was sent out to 100 white clergy of the MMSUCC can be found in the Appendix to this paper. The data is first processed by looking at a table that, very simply, ranks the 31 statements in the order in which the respondents collectively agreed with them. This tabulation is arrived at by subtracting the total number of those who disagreed with a statement from the total number of those who agreed with a statement. 70 surveys were returned. A number of +68 would result if 1 person disagreed with the statement while 69 agreed with it. On this first table, there is included the statement referred to with its corresponding rank. After this, a statement will simply be referred to as statement #1, #2, etc. After each statement there will be placed in parentheses the percentage of respondents who agreed with the statement, followed by the percentage who disagreed, followed by the percentage of those who left their answer marked unsure.

➤ Table I: Rank of Statements

➤ +68

- 2. I believe race is a problem in America today. (98, 2, 0)
- 25. Blacks and whites can have successful, intimate relationships. (98, 2, 0)

- +57
 - 3. I believe that white people receive a better education than blacks. (86, 5, 9)
- +55
 - 13. I think whites should become more involved in socializing with blacks. (79, 19, 2)
- +51
- I believe white police are more inclined to pull over a black man than a white man. (80, 7, 13)
- +48
 - 15. I am a beneficiary of white privilege. (85, 12, 3)
- +47
 - 31. I believe that many of the advantages I have come to me because I am white. (82, 13, 5)
- +45
 - 5. I would be comfortable with my white daughter dating a black man. (75, 12, 13)
 - 6. I would be comfortable with my white son dating a black woman. (75, 12, 13)
- +41
 - 28. I prefer to be white in this culture rather than black. (63, 3, 34)
- +30
 - 30. History texts written by whites show a clear racial bias. (60, 18, 22)
- +24
 - 19. I feel as comfortable around blacks as I do around whites. (63, 28, 9)
- +19
 - 29. It matters what race a person is when writing the history texts for our children. (56, 28, 16)
 - 17. Society may have been unjust to blacks, but it has also been unjust to whites. (53, 28, 19)
- -3
 - 14. I hardly ever think about what race I am. (43, 47, 10)
- -5
 - 9. There is less racial tension today than in the past. (44, 52, 4)
- -14
 - 7. I believe that affirmative action policies discriminate against white people. (32, 53, 15)
- -22
 - 11. I believe reparations should be made by whites today to blacks. (22, 53, 25)
- -23

- 12. Slavery is an evil of the past, and the burden of its resolve should not be placed on today's whites. (28, 62, 10)
 - -26
 - 23. Sometimes I am not sure what I think about blacks. (12, 75, 13)
 - -41
 - 27. I would rather have a white judge than a black judge. (5, 62, 33)
 - -42
 - 26. I feel more comfortable with a white doctor. (7, 66, 27)
 - -44
 - 22. I get angry when I think about how whites have been treated by blacks. (19,
 - 57, 24)
 - -51
 - 21. A black is as apt to succeed in America today as a white. (12, 84, 4)
 - -57
 - 20. I do not feel as if I have the social skills to interact effectively with blacks. (6, 87, 7)
 - -58
 - 8. I feel that the death penalty is fairly administered to people of all races. (6, 88, 6)
 - -60
 - 16. White people have bent over backwards trying to make up for their ancestors' treatment of blacks, and now it is time to stop. (3, 88, 9)
 - -61
 - 18. I believe that white people look and express themselves better than blacks. (2, 88, 10)
 - -62
 - 2. I believe whites are, by and large, more intelligent than blacks. (0, 94, 6)
 - 24. I feel depressed after I have been around blacks. (3, 91, 6)
 - -64
 - 10. Since the time of the civil rights movement, a level playing field has been created between the black and the white race. (2, 93, 5)
-

This table presents the basic information provided by this part of the survey. With this information it became possible to study in more detail the initial results of the survey. The data supported the following conclusions:

1. the white clergy of the MMSUCC understand that race was a problem in America;
2. their attitudes were, for the most part, not racist;
3. they recognize some of the problems faced by blacks because of their race.

It is important to examine each of those claims one at a time, using information from the table to support them.

The white clergy of the MMSUCC understand that race is a problem in America.

Of the two statements most agreed upon in the survey, one of them is that race is a problem in America. Only 1 of the 70 respondents did not agree with this. It received the highest score, a +66. After this, the next highest ranking statement is the one that suggests that whites get a better education than blacks in our culture (+55). Just a bit lower on the list is the claim that white get treated better by police than blacks (+49), and that whites are the benefactors of white privilege (+48). This is a very pivotal question. More attention will be given to this later.

Before being adjusted to the agree/disagree format, this question was ranked second on the list – meaning that those who agreed with it were more inclined to

strongly agree than just simply agree. It still ranks very high, with 85% of the respondents agreeing with it, against a 12% disagree, and coming in 6th on the list. That these clergy admit they are the beneficiaries of white privilege is crucial to this study. In some ways, the rest of the information is designed to discover what kind of a difference that makes. Respondents also gave a strong -56 to the claim that the death penalty was administered fairly to all races.

Respondents agree that history texts written by whites show “a clear racial bias.” That was written with intentionally strong language, implying not just that the texts are biased, but that they are biased with clear purpose and intention. That this gets a fairly strong +29 rating suggests once again that these clergy understand that whites use their power to create a chasm between the races, and to obscure and obfuscate the truth. Only 18% of the respondents chose to disagree with this claim.

When asked whether or not blacks have the same chance to succeed as whites, 84% disagreed, recognizing that we are far from achieving any sense of equality. When coupled with question #2, which got the 2nd lowest ranking of all questions (not one respondent agreed with this) and which asked whether or not whites are more intelligent than blacks, one sees that this inequality is not attributed to anything other than the privilege of whites. This recognition is also enforced in the survey by the high ranking (+47) of the statement that advantages come because we are white.

And finally, while at one end of the ranking stands the statement that race is a problem, at the far other end of the ranking, with the lowest rating of all (-62, only 1 person agreed with this) was the claim suggesting that the civil rights movement

leveled the playing field between blacks and whites. While this is a commonly held belief in much of the white culture today, it ranks last on this list.

**The attitudes of the white clergy
reflected in this survey are not racist.**

Some of the questions were designed specifically to determine racial attitudes and biases. As we take a look at those, we will see that for the most part the white clergy answer with a desire for and an understanding of racial equality. Let us take just a quick look at the extremes in the survey. The second of the two statements that receive the highest ranking (+66) recognized that blacks and whites can have successful, intimate relationships. Throughout the history of white America, inter-marriage has been taboo – especially when a black man entered into a relationship with a white woman. The word “intimate” intentionally inserted to suggest a sexual relationship, which one may have expected to lead at least some to disagree with this statement. And yet, only one respondent did. All others agreed with this. A little lower on the list, and yet ranking pretty high with a +43, were the pair of statements that the respondent would feel comfortable with their child dating a black man or woman. (These were the only two questions on the entire survey that resulted in the exact same pattern of responses – no two other questions of any kind were answered in the same pattern as any other question on the survey.)

In the survey, 63 agreed that they are just as comfortable around blacks as they are around whites, and when asked if they feel depressed after being around blacks, there was a clear negative response (this ranked 2nd lowest on the survey, with a very strong -60 rating). At a -43 on the list is the claim that the respondent gets angry when they think about how whites have been treated by blacks.

These white clergy recognize some of the problems faced
by blacks today because of their race.

In every instance where racial bias was suggested, the respondents (to varying degrees to be sure) showed that they believed such injustices were real. We have already seen some of this, but let us take a look once again at where this gets revealed in the study. In the survey, the following were tested: educational disparity (+55); police injustice (+49); history texts (+29); success rate same for blacks (-49); fair death penalty practices (-56); level playing field since civil rights movement (-62).

This is the good news. The white clergy know that race matters. They know that they are beneficiaries of unfair white-skin privilege. They know that blacks suffer because of their skin color. They demonstrate the kinds of attitudes that you would hope for from those who recognize racial inequality and desire justice.

But that is not the whole story.

Although respondents admitted rather overwhelmingly that they were the beneficiaries of white privilege; although the least agreed upon statement was the one that said there was now a level playing field after the civil rights movement;

although they collectively agreed that many advantages come because the recipients are white and that the death penalty is not administered fairly to blacks, yet and still:

- The statement that reparations should be paid by whites to blacks gets a rating of -22, with only 22% agreeing with this.
- Barely half of those surveyed (53%) chose not to disagree with the claim that affirmative action policies discriminate against whites, and a full 32% agreed with this claim. Let me put that more plainly: over 1/3 of the respondents think that affirmative action discriminates against whites, and another 15% is not sure that it does not.
- Almost 30% of respondents believed that because slavery was past, whites today should not be asked to resolve the injustices slavery may have created (injustices they clearly have no problem recognizing – and from which they readily admit to being beneficiaries of).
- This is somewhat inconsistent with the earlier findings that one of the two questions that most divided the respondents was the one that asked if there were less racial tension today than in the past.
- Almost everything about this group suggests that they recognize how deep the racial divisions are, and yet 44% believe there is less racial tension, and only 52% - or barely half – do not agree with this.
- The statement that whites show a clear bias claims a rating of +29, while the very next question on the survey asks if it matters what race a person is when they right history, and the group affirms this, but with a

rating of only +19. Why the lower rating? Two of the respondents who agree with the first statement actually disagree with the second one; while 6 who disagree with the second statement agree with the first. What accounts for this? How can the same person recognize that white bias is evident, and then believe that race doesn't matter?

- Forty-three of those respondents who agree that advantages that come to them because they are white DID NOT agree that reparations should be paid out to blacks.
- The statement that society has also been unjust to whites received a +17 rating, a somewhat mild agreement rating (but given the kind of injustices that they admitted to, this result comes as a bit of a surprise to me).
- These white clergy admit to many benefits from white skin, and recognize many injustices inflicted upon blacks, and yet 23 of these clergy are undecided about whether or not they would rather be black in this culture.

These are some initial observations from the data found in this first part of the survey. Further analysis will come later in the study, when more information comes from the other pieces of this research.

Part II

In Part II, respondents were asked to give a number or percentage so as to reflect how often the item in question occurred in the life of their church or in their

tenure as pastor. Each question here is listed, followed by the number of those who actually responded, and then the results of all responses to that question are shown. Also, the number of those who responded with a zero to any question is written in italics.

1. What percentage of books in your office are by black authors?

63 responded: 7 wrote a question mark as a response; the average was 7.4%; *one*

2. How many faces of color appear in the pictures in your office?

63 responded: 1 wrote in a question mark; the average was 1.4; *nineteen*

3. How many of pictures in your church portray Jesus as white, and how many black?

57 responded: 18 of those indicated "All" were white; of the remaining 41, there was a total of 111 white portrayals of a white Jesus (2.7 per church); there were a total of 10 black portrayals of Jesus (.17 per church); *twenty-eight*

4. How many people does your church employ, and of them how many are black?

60 responded: 25 black employees were counted in the survey, .4 per church; one church said all were white, and among the remaining 59 there were 317 employees, or 5.5 per church; *forty-two*

5. How many black vendors does your church use?

61 responded: 31 wrote in a question mark; a total of 13 was counted among the churches, or .2 per church; *nineteen*

6. How many times a day do you remark to someone about your race?

66 responded: 2 answered with a question mark; the total times per day of the group was 23, or .37 per person; but of the 64 that responded, only 3 of them did not say zero, and one person accounted for 20 of the 23 – if we remove that one the average per day goes down to .05; *sixty-one*

7. Is your office closed on Martin Luther King Day?

63 responded: 20 of those are not closed, which is 31%, or roughly 1 out of every three

8. What percentage of your membership is white?

61 responded: 20 report 100% white membership; 18 report 99%; 2 report a 90% white membership; 2 report a membership below 90 (both of them report a 55% white membership); the rest are between 95% and 98%

9. How many blacks have you confirmed in your time as a minister?

68 responded: there were a total of 97 confirmed, or 1.4 per minister's career; *forty-four*

10. How many blacks have you baptized in your time as a minister?

66 responded: a total of 90 were counted, and one reported "many", for an average of 1.3 per minister's career; *thirty-eight*

11. What percentage of your church council is white?

64 responded: all but 8 were 100% white; the other 8 report 50% (2), 90%, 91%, 95%, 98%(2), and 99%

12. How many of your members that you know of marched in the Civil Rights movement?

64 responded: 5 answered with a question mark, and one wrote "many"; of the remaining, 162 were counted (50 of them from one church), for an average of 2.7 per church (1.9 per is we take out the one church with 50); *twenty-nine*

13. How many times have you preached about racial justice in the past year?

58 responded: 197 total sermons preached on race, for an average of 3.2 per minister (one listed 26 times, without which the average would be 2.8 per); *twelve*

14. How many time have you spoken about white supremacy and white privilege in the past year?

61 responded: 172 total, or 2.8 per person; *thirty-one*

15. How many black families did you call on as prospective members in the past year?

58 responded: 67 total (20 from one person) for an average of 1.1 per person (.8 per if we account for the 20 from one); *thirty-five*

16. How many white families did you call on as prospective members in the past year?

57 responded: 3 indicated “many,” 3 answered with a question mark; the total of the others was 418, or 8.5 per church; *ten*

It is at this point that one can begin to test some of the observations made in the first part of the survey. It will be recalled that responses in the first part of the survey indicated a real proclivity for recognizing racial inequality, and even a desire

to be active participants in the creation of a more just and equitable society.

Respondents tended to believe they were alert to, aware of, and opposed to racial discrimination.

Part II of the survey is the first attempt to determine whether or not those attitudes and understandings make a real difference. This part will begin to reveal whether or not white clergy can be not just aware of discrimination and privilege, but effective change agents. Will the churches in which they serve as leaders bear tangible evidence of their desire for racial justice and equality? Will their own practices in ministry give an accounting of them as advocates of racial equality, and will such advocacy, if demonstrated, bear any fruit?

One way to summarize this part of the survey is to put together the picture of an average white pastor and his or her church. Now, such a pastor and such a church does not exist as we know it: we should be very clear about that. But, if one existed that mirrored the average of what we have here, this is what it would look like. To reach whole numbers, all numbers that end in a .4 or lower will be rounded off to the lower whole number, and .5 or above to the larger whole number.

A fifty year old white male pastor serves a church whose membership is 97% white. Of the books on his shelf, 7 out of every 100 are by a black author. Of the faces that appear in the pictures he hangs on his wall, one of them will be a person of color. Hanging in his church will be three pictures of Jesus, all of them white. He has on staff with him 5 other employees, all of which are white. Of the many vendors that support the ministry of the church, from the company that supplies the soda for the coke machine to the copy repairman and others, not one of those vendors is a black-owned business. Throughout his busy day, it will never once occur to him to mention his race to another person. He will shut down his office for Martin Luther King Day. He has served as an ordained clergyperson for 24 years, and in those 24 years he

has confirmed 1 black, and baptized one black. While 97% of his members are white, every member of his church council is white. He is aware that 3 of his members were active in the civil rights movement. In the last year, he preached three sermons about the issue of race, and also at some time during the year he spoke to someone about the issue of white supremacy and white privilege. Of the 10 families he called on as prospective members in the last year, one of them will have been black.

Again, the creation of this person is a fiction, but it gives us a clue as to what life in the average church served by a white pastor in the MMSUCC looks like. But there is another way to do this. If one defines the typical church (over against the average church) as that church that represents the answer most frequently given to each of the above questions, the picture changes slightly (perhaps not much, but slightly). Let us take a look at this church and its pastor.

Served by a white male about 50 years of age, 5 out of every 100 books on his shelf are written by a black author. Of the pictures that hang on his wall, not one contains the face of a person of color. Every picture of Jesus hanging in his church is white. His church employs no blacks. He does not know if his church uses a vendor from a black owned business. He never even once thinks to mention his race to another person before the day is done. He will take Martin Luther King, Jr.'s holiday off. In his 24 years, he has not once confirmed nor baptized a black person. All of his members, and therefore all of his council members are white. He does not of anyone from his church who marched in the Civil Rights movement. He will not once choose to preach about the issue of racial justice, and within the year he will not one time mention the subject of white supremacy or white privilege to anybody. He will not call on a black family as a prospective member of his church this year.

When such a picture is painted, it is very difficult to see the white churches and the white clergy of the MMSUCC as anything but very comfortably ensconced in their world of white privilege, white power, and white supremacy. To be sure,

there are more tests to run (namely, we have yet to view the results of the interviews that were conducted, and the results of the newsletters that were collected) before we can make any such claims with greater clarity and certitude, but the conclusion at this point seems clear: being white in the MMSUCC means a great deal.

If one asks whether or not the white clergy's commitment to racial equality, coupled with the denominations clear call to be a Multi-racial church, has effected any meaningful changes in the life of the Conference, it is hard to see where that might be demonstrated.

- The overall membership of its churches remains at 97.3% white.
- 56 of the 64 churches that responded still have an all white council.
- Only two of all of those churches have more than one black sitting on them.
- 44 of the 68 pastors responding have never once in their entire career as a minister confirmed a young black child.
- 38 of the 66 have never baptized a black Christian.
- 35 of the 58 did not call on a black family as a prospective member in the last year

It is time for a short pause here and just a quick word about those last three items. To go an entire career without once baptizing or confirming a black Christian, and to go an entire year without calling on even one black family, is not an accident of time and place: it is a conscious decision made by the pastor. These

results alone can be seen as a scandalous indictment against the commitment of the white clergy of this conference to move out from under a world of white power, supremacy, and privilege.

- This same group of pastors admitted in Part I of the survey that whites should become more involved in socializing with blacks (3rd highest score on the survey (+54)), and that they have the social skills to interact effectively with blacks, and yet they visit on average themselves .8 black families per year
- An average of 1.4 black faces appear in pictures on the walls in the offices of these white clergy, and in nineteen of them there are no black faces
- 63 of the 66 respondents admit that they never mention their race to anyone on a given day. This is somewhat inconsistent with the result of question #14 in Part I, where respondents were collectively ambiguous about how often they think about what race they are. 47% disagreed with this (43% did agree with it, and 10% were not sure), suggesting that they do think about what race they are. One would have expected then something other than 63 saying they never mention their race to another person.
- When asked about vendors from black-owned business, 31 could not even answer the question, and nineteen of the 30 who did answer claimed that they had zero black vendors

- Even though the respondents admit that white history writers skew the histories told in their textbooks, only 9 of the 70 churches have anything other than a white Jesus hanging anywhere. This seems an especially revealing piece of information. It has long been known that Jesus was not white, and yet and still the white clergy show a strong need to perpetuate this particular lie about him.

CHAPTER SIX

NEWSLETTERS

In some ways, this piece of the study could be considered the most important. In each of the other pieces, those involved knew three things, any one of which by itself could have affected the way that they answered. They knew first of all that they were subjects in a research project. Second, they knew that the study itself was about racism in the MMSUCC. Third, the author serves as a presiding judicatory over all of them, and they knew he would be tabulating the results. This latter one is not to suggest that he would hold any of their answers against them, or that they feared that. In at least the survey their answers were anonymous. But it would not be unusual for many to think as they answer that for the sake of their church's reputation, or the conference's, they would look for ways to make them appear perhaps better than they were.

But no one knew that the author would be collecting data from their newsletters. These are sent into the Conference office as a matter of rote for almost every congregation in the Conference.

None of the pastors were called and told that over the next three months their newsletters would be examined for content to find out what they revealed about white power, white privilege, and white supremacy. What was placed in these newsletters was put there with no knowledge that it would serve to aid this research. This is why it is

suggested that this data is the purest. If any of my data was in danger of influence due to the factors named above, it could not be this set.

Having said that, this piece will be the most profound. What it will disclose will be genuine. Its revelations will need to be examined very carefully.

100 newsletters were collected from churches in all three geographic regions that function within the MMSUCC over a four month period. Each one was assigned a number, by which it would be referred as the research continued. Specific newsletters in this study will always be referred to by the arbitrarily assigned number.

Each of the newsletters was read over a number of times, and with each reading something different was asked of them. The first perusal was simply to find out how many of the graphics used in the newsletter portrayed white skin, and how many portrayed black skin. This is a very important piece. In the survey that went out, many churches had no black members. Some of them will (and have) argued that this is because there are simply no black families any near where they live.

This is a place where that argument cannot be used. While church pastors and secretaries may not be able to determine who moves into and out of their neighborhoods, they can, and in fact DO, choose what will and what will not appear in their newsletter. And because there can easily be found graphics that portray a wide variety of skin tones and colors, one would expect that for a conference in which resides clergy who know that race is a problem, who belong to a denomination that prides itself on becoming multi-racial and multi-cultural, and who are aware of their own white-skin privilege that their would be a healthy balance of races portrayed in their own publications. Again, this is an important piece.

Each of these newsletters was read over again to discover how many times race was mentioned, how many articles chose to address the issue of race, and how many pastors chose to address this matter of race in their own monthly articles. For the same reasons mentioned in the receding paragraph, this becomes another important piece. One would expect to see a good number of articles about this matter, since there was such a profound recognition from the white clergy who filled in their survey that race was a problem in America today.

Knowing that this is what is being looked for, and sensing as well how important these discoveries will be, let us then proceed.

After counting no fewer than three times, it was determined that in the 100 newsletters collected, there were 1,375 graphics that showed either a human face or an easily recognizable human body part on which the color of the skin could be detected. To be sure, some of the portrayals were clearly human, but concocted in such a way that skin coloration was not to be determined. These were not included in this number. Of that number, 18 were distinguishably black and 1,357 were clearly white.

That is astounding.

- 100 newsletters,
- Four months,
- 1,375 graphics,
- 18 portrayals of black skin,

This speaks for itself.

But it does not speak by itself, for an array of other revelations will now follow.

In every one of those newsletters, the pastor wrote an article. In many of them, there were two or even three pastor's articles (this would result when a church employed more than one pastor). This is a long-standing tradition in the life of most churches. The pastor is given free reign to write about whatever he or she wants: a direct benefit of the freedom of the pulpit that means so much to the clergy and membership of this faith tradition and which extends beyond the pulpit to the pen. One would expect, in some ways, the clergy to be a bit ahead of the laity on issues of social justice, and in particular here about the issue of race. As has been noted a number of times already, the white clergy of this conference demonstrate an awareness of the problem of race. One would then anticipate that there would be at least a small sampling of pastors willing to raise the issue of racial equality and justice.

It did not happen. Not one pastor in this time period wrote a single article about the problem of race in America. And in all of the articles that were written, only one ever even mentioned race. In that article, found in #39, he writes simply: "I remember that, early in my ministry, race was such a terrible dividing issue among people." This is the only mention of race at all. He does not go on to say anymore about the matter in this article.

In those same 100 newsletters, which range in length from 54 pages (the longest one I found) to a minimum of four pages, it can be conservatively estimated that an average of twenty articles of varying lengths appear (that would be a rough estimate of 2,000 articles). In those articles, race is *mentioned* 11 times. It is addressed in an article four times. What follows is a list of each instance.

- #38 In an article announcing one of our all-church offerings, this sentence appears: “The United Church of Christ is committed to being a multiracial and multicultural church that welcomes the gifts of all God’s people. (Almost ironic, isn’t it?)

- #49 In this newsletter two articles appear, and one of the very few that actually writes solely about the matter of race. The first is a poem entitled “Races Divided by a Chasm of Fear”, by Tony Clark. The second comes in a list of 23 possible subjects for an adult education class. On this list, which is actually a survey to find out which subject matters most appeal to the members, one of the choices listed is: Reparations for Slavery/ Other Injustices.

- #48 In an article about this church’s history there appears this: “Population shifted and changed through the years and in 1953, the congregation voted not only to remain at the location but invited persons of all colors into membership.... Currently, membership is about half African American and half white.”

- #47 In an article that lists some of the actions taken at this past summer’s General Synod, there appears the following: **“Resolution: An anti-racist church** - *Calls upon all settings of the church to become explicitly anti-racist and to offer anti-racism training for church employees and volunteers.* **Resolution: Racism and militarism in U.S. drug policy** - *Addresses injustices related to the U.S. war on drugs.* **Resolution: Renewing the battle against racism** - *A resolution calling upon all UCC members to be engaged in anti-racism work.*

- #46 Number 6 on a top ten list of reasons to check out the UCC is “No boxes.” To explain that, the paragraph that follows reads in part: “Among our many firsts, we were the first mainline church to take a stand against slavery (1700), the first to ordain an African American person (1785),....”

- #43 In another article about an all-church offering, there is a list of those who will benefit from the money collected. On that list it says that it will support ministries that address “racial and economic justice.”

- A prayer is found in #42 that reads: “Almighty God: you made all people in your image and gave us the gift of relationship with one another. Give us wisdom and determination as we work to dismantle the evil of racism in our Church and other communities in obedience to your commandments to love you and one another. Raise up among us people of strength and courage to speak out and take action with love and commitment to end all forms of discrimination based on old racist practices that have no place in our world today. Help us to patiently listen to one another as we all work to end the pain and suffering that has imprisoned us all: and finally bring us into your presence as one people, united in your love.”

- #41 In an article about adult book readings, the March 21st selection is A Lesson Before Dying by Ernest Gaines. Its description reads thusly: *“A young man who returns to 1940s Cajun country to teach visits a black youth on death row for a crime he didn’t commit.”*

- #40 In an article about the same all-church offering, it is mentioned in a list that one of the things the offering helps to address the root causes of is “racism.”

And there you have it. Of the 2,000 or so articles about pot-lucks and choir rehearsals, youth lock-ins and trustee minutes, 9 articles mention race. Of those nine, it can really only be said about two of them that they address the issue of race directly and with clear purpose. Those two would be the poem by Tony Clark in #49, and the prayer found in # 42.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE INTERVIEWS

Whereas the survey and the examination of the newsletters let me gather data from a very wide field of inquiry, they did not afford me the opportunity to spend a lot of time in one place. Once a survey was completed, and once a newsletter came to me, there was no way to do any follow up examination. There was no way to ask if there were subtleties of meaning. There was no way to ask for clarification of meaning if questions arose.

With an interview, one does not get the luxury of including a lot of people in the study, but one does get to spend a lot of time with a few people. An interview lets one dig much deeper with a smaller number of respondents. That is why this method was chosen as the third piece of the research presentation.

Four individuals from various parts of the conference were selected as subjects for the interviews. They range in age from about 35 to 65, and all are currently active in ministry in the Missouri Mid-South Conference. They were carefully chosen so that all three Associations were included; so that male and female were represented; so that all demographic regions were represented (rural, small town, urban, and suburban). One pastor was chosen because she is a white pastor serving on of our two fully integrated congregations (the other church is pastured by a black minister and was not included in

the study). Two of the four have spent their entire ministerial career in the Missouri Mid-South Conference. Two of them three did not grow up in Missouri, and two of them did. Two began pasturing churches in other areas of the country, and then chose to come to Missouri later in their career.

Each individual was contacted by me to ask if they would be interested, able, and willing to participate in the research that was being conducted. They were told the subject matter of my Doctoral work: Reframing the Dialogue on Racism. All of them had already participated in the study by filling out the survey that was sent out prior to the interview being conducted. They also were told that the field of study would be the white clergy of the Missouri Mid-South Conference, which is why they were being asked to be the subjects for the interview.

While on the phone with them, arrangements were made for the interview itself to be conducted. They were asked for permission in that first conversation, and after they agreed to be a part of the study, if they thought it would be alright to tape the interview. Each of them agreed to this. Two of the four were interviewed in their offices, and two of the four agreed to meet in the author's office for the interview.

The decision was made to interview these particular individuals by the author. He knew each of them personally, two of the four for over ten years. Though not close, three of them could be characterized as friends. With each of the four, he was aware of a tendency to be active in issues of social justice. With three of the four, he was aware from personal experience and conversation with them of a desire to be active participants in anti-racist agendas. Given what he knew about each of them, and as well about others

that could have been asked, a good representation of the clergy of the conference was achieved. This was partly the reason they were asked.

After agreeing to be a participant and then arranging for the time and location of the interview, the author prepared ahead of time a set of questions that were to be asked of each participant. He had agreed to this method with his Professional Associates, but had also agreed that there might be some variance in the interview when, with each one, he would ask some follow up questions for clarity or for the purpose of bringing an interview back on track if an answer was not clear or a question misunderstood.

It was also on the advice of his Associates that the questions not focus directly on the subject matter. In other words, he would not address *directly* the subject of race in the interview. It is important to understand that what is being examined in the study is the role of white clergy of MMSUCC in white power, privilege, and supremacy. Questions would have to be asked that could draw this information out. The task of the interviewer in this process would be to encourage the participant to tell their story, so to speak: to put them at ease and allow them to share in their own way who they were.

For that reason, he did not choose to ask questions that would seem otherwise, in this study, to make some sense. For example, he did not ask them if they grew up in all white neighborhoods; if they attended all white schools; how they felt about working in all white churches (if that were the case); how they felt about matters of race; in what ways did they actively participate in agendas and activities whose sole purpose was to end racism; in what ways were they still unable to overcome their own racist tendencies; how did they feel about the UCC's decision to become a Multi-racial, Multi-cultural church, and what were they doing to make that happen.

Sensing that these questions would possibly serve to put the participant on the defensive, and because of that shut down the rapport necessary for a good interview, other tactics were chosen. We were also aware that my serving as a judicatory with some responsibilities for oversight of these participants ran the risk of answers being given to questions like that which were less than truthful and more intended to impress me.

It was after much thought and processing that the following questions were chosen. They are listed each of them separately here with an explanation why it was thought these questions were the right ones to ask. It is important again to emphasize that the purpose of the interview, and of each question on its own, is to discover the ways in which white clergy participate in systems of white power, privilege, and supremacy.

Question 1: Who are you? What words do you to describe or characterize yourself?

This is a very important question. Much research indicates that one of the foundations of white power, white privilege, and white supremacy is the notion of the invisibility of whiteness by white people. “Most white people, in my experience, tend not to think of themselves in racial terms.”¹ To make the point again, we turn to Richard Dyer, who in his essay “The Matter of Whiteness,” writes:

This assumption that white people are just people, which is not far off saying that whites are people whereas other colours are something else, is endemic to white culture.... bell hooks, for instance, has noted how amazed and angry white liberals become

¹ Harold Dalton, “Failing to See” in *White Privilege: Essential Readings on the Other Side of Racism*, ed. Paula Rothenberg (New York, NY: Worth Publishers, 2002), 15.

when attention is drawn to their whiteness, when they are seen by non-white people as white.²

It should, then, be tested to see whether white clergy who claim to have been themselves active in anti-racist agendas, and who have been ordained into a denomination that has called its members to be engaged in the creation of a Multi-racial community, identified themselves as white. Each of those interviewed could be easily classified as one of those bell hooks calls a white liberal.

It must also be said that this question seemed important for a somewhat more personal reason. The first thing the author and his classmates did for their Doctoral work was write a Spiritual Autobiography. Only after that was done did their mentor point out that not once did they mention race anywhere in that piece. Now, they were students in a program that by definition was challenging us to reframe the dialogue on racism, and nowhere did it occur to them to mention race in the autobiographies.

They rewrote them with this in mind, but what still did not sink in was that in taking about race, they should racialize themselves. Again, their mentor helped them to see that when they brought up the subject of race, it was always and only people of color who were racialized. White characters who played a role in their story were never identified as white, whereas every black person who showed up was tagged in the telling of the story as a black man, woman, or child. Once again, the paper was rewritten with this in mind.

Once this was done, there was discovered a little bit more than curiosity about this phenomenon. Were they the only ones for whom this pattern was obvious? The mentor recalled that when the same task was required of his black students in previous classes,

² Richard Dyer, "The Matter of Whiteness," in Rothenberg, *White Privilege*, 10.

they all—without exception—immediately and often referred to their race as a primary characteristic. With permission, a fairly informal study was conducted of past Spiritual Autobiographies. With the help of those who knew, they randomly selected autobiographies of former students. In no case did a white student mention that they were white, directly or indirectly. In every case, the black student chose to mention their race somewhere in the paper.

The author did his own little experiment this past summer while serving as director for a Senior High church camp. There were 53 participants in the weeklong camp, two of which were black, the rest of which were white. In a Bible study that he conducted, he asked each young man and woman to write on a sheet of paper five things that would help identify them if someone were to walk into camp and ask for them and only had that paper to help them. The first thing—the very first thing—written on the list of the two black students was that they were black. Not one—NOT ONE—of the fifty one white students in the camp listed white as one of the five things that someone could use to identify them.

Given this recognizable tendency of the white majority to not see themselves as white, the author wanted to ask this question. In some ways, he actively set the question up to help them prove his hypothesis wrong. It would be the very first question he would ask after reminding them that his research would look into the participation of white clergy in systems of white power, privilege, and supremacy. He reminded them not only of his purpose, but that they were white. He then asked them, in their own words, to tell h who they were, and to find words that would serve to describe themselves.

Responses

Not one of the clergy interviewed chose to identify themselves as white.

Here are the responses to this first question:

- 1st participant: Minister, social worker, mother, All-together; I have spent my ministry in places that excite me; I am not called to serve everywhere, and I have chosen where to use those gifts.
- 2nd participant: Socially I am from Indiana, middle class, college graduate, left St. Louis in 1976; professionally, I have been a pastor for 23 years, have grown since seminary; shaped by my experiences with a disabled brother for whom I was guardian; I see my attitudes as in line with what a pastor should be; I see injustice for the disabled because I was disabled myself; I wish I could be a renaissance man, but am more a jack of all trades and a master of none; I keep separate my independent needs and the demands of being a pastor.
- 3rd participant: I am a UCC pastor, ordained for 33 years; will be retiring soon; I am a New Englander by birth, a Mid-Westerner by career; a father and husband; a toy collector, because I never grew up.
- 4th participant: I am a lot: father, husband, pastor, Camp Capitol campaign director. Beyond roles, a person whose life story has unfolded through difficulty, has gone down many roads, and changed a lot over 30+ years

with the church; one who has discovered the value of change and continues to seek to grow; one who loves life, who began as a biologist and who because of that appreciates the diversity of life, and the people who are an extension of that; one who tries to function with integrity, who is truthful, very open, and who values sharing my story with others so they know that they're ok; I am willing to be vulnerable.

Responses to this first question show that not one of the clergy identified themselves as white. This is consistent with what earlier research has come to discover about the white race in general in a system of white power, privilege, and supremacy. These white pastors can talk about their roles: three of the four respondents began by naming what they do, and the fourth one—who began by talking about his social characteristics—then went immediately to listing the roles performed for others. All of them listed both their vocational role, and their family role—how they function in the various settings of their life.

Each of them also, with varying degrees of directness, described a bit of their personality or attitude. This can be seen in different ways. One mentioned a tendency to choose a setting for ministry as a characteristic; one the influence of both a personal disability and oversight of a family member with his own disability as shaping his identity; one talked about a desire to never grow up as a primary characteristic; while another talked about life's pain as being formative, integrity as being essential, and value in a willingness to be open and honest.

But not one mentioned that they were white. It did not occur to them that when asked who they were to speak the words "I am white." The next set of questions were

chosen to discover whether or not being white impacted where they lived, what and where they studied in school, and how and where they got their jobs. Of course it would. But what stands out here is that even though they will record histories that will disclose this to be true, it will not occur to them when asked who they are, or when asked to use words to describe themselves, to say that they are white.

Question 2: Talk about where you grew up: who were your mentors, role models and influences either in school, neighborhood, church, etc.?

George Lipshitz writes: "...recent surveys have shown repeatedly that nearly every social choice that white people make about where they live, what schools they attend, what careers they pursue, and what policies they endorse is shaped by considerations involving race."³ This question wants to discover the ways that race-based decisions shaped the life of the person being interviewed. It must be understood that none of the participants claimed that their childhood living arrangements were based on racially motivated decisions. Nor did they suggest that the schools they attended, the teachers who stood before them, the classes that they selected, and the material that would influence their thought and theology were determined by folk whose motives were impugned by racial bias.

This question was chosen not only to discover who and what shaped the coming to be of the person. George Lipshitz is right when he suggests that every decision made by white people about such matters always involves a consideration of race. What needed to be tested was not whether or not this was true: it is accepted it as a given. Instead, it needed to be discovered whether or not there was an awareness of or admission of this

³ Lipshitz, *Possessive Investment*, viii.

element of racial consideration in the mind of the respondent. To what extent were their white privilege and their racial bias evident to themselves?

A few things occur to the author as he processed the answers given by the participants. First, not one ever mentions the race of a teacher, a mentor, a neighbor, a professor, a pastor, an author, or any other influence unless they note by exception that the person was not white. For example, two of the respondents, when talking about their favorite teachers, made a point of saying how important it was for them to have had a black teacher in grade school. In telling this part of the story both of them mentioned that this black teacher, the only they had while growing up, was in fact one of their favorites. They were exceptional teachers from whom they learned a great many things.

The author will pause here and do a little self-reflection. He has often told the story of Mr. Richard Lee—his only black teacher growing up. Mr Lee was everybody's favorite. The author's brother Jerry named his first son after himself, and his second son after Mr. Lee. The author is aware of a few things as he tells this story.

First, he has always referred to Mr. Lee as his only black teacher. He has never bothered to refer to any other teacher of his as white—and the rest of them were white (until he got to grad school, where there he took classes from one whom the student body referred to simply as the token black: a reference that both implied there would never be another, and that this one was there less for ability than for the need to demonstrate an openness to racial diversity).

Second, he tells this story often as a way of alluding to his liberal openness to people of color. The sense here is that embracing a black male role model offers credibility to his anti-racist practices.

And finally, that he and the two respondents all remark about the superior abilities of this particular teacher who happened to be black discloses two things worthy of mention.

The first is a subtle sort of wonderment that a person of color could have such abilities. The author is aware that as a child, Mr. Lee was perceived to be the exception to the rule. It was commonly held by the white people in his family, community, and culture that whites were smarter than and more articulate than black men, women, and children. His own father used to preach this to him in not so subtle ways. He would say that there were blacks and there were niggers, and Mr. Lee was black. He would (and in fact still does) point out to him that places like Notre Dame and Stanford were some of the few schools left where white athletes still had a chance to play. Because their academic standards were set as high as they were, blacks didn't stand much of a chance to succeed there. And so it has often surprised whites to discover that a black could be so smart. The author thinks that one of the things that makes moments like these stand out is not just the fact that they only had one black teacher, but just the wonderment that this black teacher defied what was widely accepted to be true about blacks in general.

The second thing that occurs to me about this recollection is that all mentioned about this teacher that they had superior abilities. The author never thought about this as a child, but what he now knows to be true is that a black teacher did not get a job in a white school unless they were of superior ability. And certainly, even if they got it, they did not keep it unless they were far better than what would have been expected of a white teacher. They not only had to be good, they had to have the ability to get along well with whites. The author had many teachers about whom he and his parents constantly

complained. They kept their jobs. No black man or woman would have survived that. Because they were exceptional, they were given a chance. Because they remained so, they kept their jobs. Such exceptional talent made an impression on us who were white. It is precisely this phenomenon that Robert Jensen had in mind when he wrote that:

as Henry Louis Gates Jr. once pointed out, if affirmative action policies were in place for the next hundred years, it's possible that at the end of that time the university could have as many mediocre minority professors as it has mediocre white professors. . . ., scores of white professors have slid through the system because their flaws were overlooked out of solidarity based on race.⁴

Again, every participant mentioned the race of an influence, mentor, or friend only if the one in question was not white. There were two exceptions to this, sort of (the following references are not to a specific person, but about communities). One participant noted that the neighborhood he grew up in was all white. Another noted in a discussion about inviting a black preacher to his church that the church was all white (see below).

One described growing up in Houston with many Latino neighbors. One talked about growing up in a half Jewish neighborhood. One spoke about the problems he had when he invited a black preacher in to his pulpit for a service of Installation. Another time he talked about the family friend he and his wife invited to dinner that was black. In this context he referred to his all-white church and town ("You could have had every black in the city join us in our living room and still had seats left open"), and how his openness to black colleagues and friends ended his ministry at that church.

The point being made here is that persons of color are noted as exceptions, and as the exceptions their race needs to be noted. White memories do not cite whiteness as a qualifying characteristic. When one participant talks about his staff sergeant, or another

⁴ Robert Jensen, "White Privilege Shapes the U.S.," in Rothenberg, *White Privilege*, 104.

about her choir teacher, still another about his history teacher, or another about a beloved English teacher it went without saying that these were all white people.

Among the four who were interviewed we find a variety of educational experiences. One studied history in undergraduate work, one biology and chemistry, one English and Philosophy, and the fourth political science and music. A point was made of asking about their influences and their field of study. Every author noted, without exception, was white and European. (They were not identified in the conversation as white and European, but every name mentioned was recognized by the author to be just that: some of them include J. D. Salinger, Fyodor Dostoevsky, William Faulkner, Joseph Conrad, Aristotle, Aquinas, Edith Wharton, Dag Hammersjold, etc.)

All four attended recognizably white universities, some of them more than one.

All four attended white seminaries and were almost exclusively taught there by white faculties. Two of the four graduated from Eden Seminary. One attended both St. Paul's Methodist Seminary and Central Baptist (from which he graduated). The fourth attended Andover Newton.

All were asked to name their theological and biblical influences. Most of the names given were white German theologians, and every single one named was white. None of the respondents named a black theologian as in influence on them. By name, these theologians and Biblical scholars were recognized as having had an influence on one or more of the participants: Thomas Aquinas, G. W. F. Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Paul Tillich (three of the four mentioned him), Karl Barth, Walter Brueggeman, Doug Meeks, Karl Rahner, Emil Brunner, McQuerry, Bernard Anderson, Gerhard VonRaad, Dorothy Day, Harnack, John Wesley.

In perhaps a gross understatement, Shawn Kelly argues in his book *Racializing Jesus* that “modern biblical scholarship is trapped by the racialized discourse that it employs. It is this racialized discourse that has led and continues to lead the discipline into unfortunate directions.”⁵ In his landmark book he will argue that even well intentioned biblical scholars and theologians end up reproducing a school of thought that racializes Jesus and perpetuates the myth of white supremacy. It makes no difference what the intent of the scholar or preacher is; if their own theologies were birthed from the school of European thought that was fired in the oven of an Enlightenment that produced the concept of Manifest Destiny and the colonialization of the world by white European conquerors, then they cannot help but be perpetuators of a racialized gospel. “It is my contention that that racialized resources have prevented many biblical scholars from creating the sort of liberatory critical practice that they explicitly endorse.”⁶

Whether they realize it or not, this small sampling of white clergy demonstrates Kelly’s point. Without even being aware of it, white clergy submit their theological identities to white only authors of a “racialized discourse.” This theology cannot be escaped by clergy who are unable at this point to even notice that this has occurred. As Kelly points out, even the best intentioned of our liberal pastors (and one would count each of the participants among that group) live with theological premises that endorse white supremacy and undergird white privilege. George Lipshitz agrees: “I contend that the artificial construction of whiteness almost always comes to possess white people themselves unless they develop antiracist identities, unless they disinvest themselves of

⁵ Kelly, *Racializing Jesus*, 5.

⁶ Ibid., 12.

their investment in white supremacy.”⁷ The white clergy as a whole, and this group in microcosm, belie the notion that they are a part of a church that has put its racist past behind them. Listen again to Lipshitz: “There is an element of choice in all of this. White people always have the option of becoming antiracist, although not enough have done so.”⁸

Question 3: How did you come to receive the call under which you are now serving?

This question is of particular significance. Affirmative action debates point out to us the level at which our culture pays attention to skin color when applicants seek employment. And whether one supports them or not as the just and fair way to remedy the situation, it has become clear to us that skin still matters. No where is that more apparent than in our churches, which find themselves immune from any governmental fair employment mandates that may or may not function in their communities.

The author wanted to try and discover if employment opportunities for these individuals betrayed any race bias – either on their part or on the part of those who called them. This is not so easy to do: again, the type of questions that were asked in the interview were not that direct. He could not ask a participant if they knew that they were hired because they were white. The interest in asking the question the way he did was simply to listen to their response and try and detect the presence of white privilege. He is aware that the answer to this question may or may not come out in their responses. But as Associate Conference Minister, he also knew that he had access to the kind of

⁷ Lipshitz, *Possessive Investment*, viii.

⁸ Ibid., viii.

information that could help him uncover the kind of relevant information that would get him closer to that answer.

For example, he am aware that three of the churches served by these ministers have never hired a black minister. He is aware that one of those three is currently called by the Conference and is working on their staff. They are not a church per se, but it is nonetheless true about them that they have never called a black minister to serve on their staff.

He is aware that three of the four have been called to placements that have over a 97% white membership (this includes the conference).

The fourth person interviewed is serving one of our two integrated churches. The church has about a 50% white membership and a 50% black membership. In the last year, they celebrated the 50th anniversary of their decision to integrate the congregation. The decision is viewed there as an historic one, and the church membership reflects well their intention to be fully integrated. The history of the pastorate tells a bit of a different story. In the entire history of the church, including the last fifty years of integration, the church has called one black minister to serve as pastor. Her tenure there lasted barely two years and ended in bitter conflict.

The author serves as the search and call officer for the St. Louis Association churches (an Association is a geographical region within a Conference). In the polity of his denomination, churches have full autonomy and can call whomever they wish to serve as their pastor. When they choose to have him (and it would be unusual that they would not), he serves as a consultant in their search for a minister. This can often be a daunting

task for a church, and the instruction and guidance a search and call officer can provide can be very beneficial to them.

One of the things the author does with every committee is ask them if they are going to choose to limit their search in any way. More often than not they tell him no. And yet every committee he has worked with has rejected every black candidate he has presented to them. Many of the committees he works with ends up telling him not to send them profiles of black candidates. When he makes a point of directly encouraging them to be open the receiving a black minister, he is often told that although they are not prejudiced, they just don't think others in the church is ready for that. Only two predominantly white churches ever in the MMSUCC have called a full-time black minister. One called a West African Presbyterian minister, and the other a Jamaican man. Both are rural churches. One of the two was hired only after four visits by conference staff, a not so veiled threat by a council member to leave the church, and a concerted effort to engage other members in the church in a walkout on the day the vote was taken. It should be noted that while these two churches have called a black man, no white church in the MMSUCC has called a black man born and raised in America.

It has been the author's consistent experience as a search and call officer that white churches in the MMSUCC are looking only at and only for white ministers. Whether those who are interviewed in this study know that, or can admit it, he cannot say. No one mentioned that this was a factor in their being called to their church.

The author had conversation with the black ministers who are now serving in the MMSUCC. One is serving an integrated church in North St. Louis, one of the poorest neighborhoods in the city. Its population is almost entirely black. One is serving a church

in Little Rock, Arkansas that is the merger of two congregations, one which was historically black and one which was historically white. This is a very small and struggling church, and yet both churches retain the right after the merger to choose a pastor. He believes this to be the result of the white church's unwillingness to accept the ministry of the black pastor, but this is nothing more than a suspicion. Another is serving an historically black congregation in Memphis, TN. To his knowledge, no white minister has ever asked to serve that church. The pulpit had been open for over three years before its current pastor was hired.

Each of these ministers has shared with him stories of their own search and call procedures in the MMSUCC. One of them was told by conference staff what churches he would be eligible to interview for, and which ones he would not. The list of those for which he was eligible was small, and included a very few struggling inner-city churches whose white members had long since abandoned them for the suburbs, or the black church in Memphis and the black church in Little Rock.

He did receive a call to a white, inner city church just north of the downtown in St. Louis. The church was actually organized across the street from one of the largest housing projects in St. Louis history, and was governed by a mission organization known as Neighborhood Houses. That mission agency's board of directors extended the call to this pastor, and had oversight of all of his activities. When he announced that he was going to evangelize in the projects not fifty feet from the front door of the church, he was told that this would not be acceptable. The church's only worshipping members were a small remnant of elderly whites who did not want to share their sanctuary with the black tenants in the projects across the street. After only one year, he decided this arrangement

was not acceptable to him and he began to search for another church in St. Louis. He was told that was all he would get, and if he wanted he could take the black church in Memphis or the black church in Little Rock. He took the one in Little Rock.

You must understand that the United Church of Christ does not place its pastors. It does not have the power nor the authority to make decisions like these on behalf of its member churches. The author has been taken to task by committees who suspect that he may have been filtering, screening, or recommending candidates without their knowing about it.

In spite of that, no one doubts that those rules do not apply to black candidates. In almost every white church, there is an understanding that someone should screen out the profiles of black candidates. It has been the author's personal experience that committees are very uncomfortable telling him that they do not want to consider a black minister. It would certainly be easier for them if he would screen those profiles out before they come.

There have been times when it did not come through on a given profile that a candidate was black. The search committee later found this out – either in an interview with them, or by checking with references or past employers. In those cases, the author will invariably get a call wondering why he did not tell them what he knew about the candidate when he gave them the profile.

All of this serves somewhat as a background to this question asked of the candidate. The truth about all of them is that their race matters: there is not enough evidence in the hiring practices and history of the MMSUCC to suggest otherwise. This background is essential in understanding the meaning behind some of the responses that will be offered by the participants. Not one of them will indicate that their race had

anything to do with their being called. And yet there *is* enough evidence to suggest that this has always been the case in the MMSUCC.

In contrast to the black pastor referred to earlier who was told he would not be given another white church in the conference, one of the four white pastors who were interviewed told me that their profile was sent only to one church. They knew that this was the church they wanted; that they had enough money not to have to worry about whether or not they got the call; and that they could afford to pick and choose not only where they wanted to work, but if they wanted to. The one church to which the profile was submitted extended the call to this pastor. The pastor believes that this was the work of the Holy Spirit—how else could this have happened?

One of the persons who was interviewed was recruited for the position in which they are now serving. Although their profile was submitted and they interviewed for a position that was open to others, they had already been visited by the head of the search process and told that if they wanted to leave their current position and take this call, the position would be given to them. This is a clergy person who has a history of depression, and who has worked very hard with counselors to maintain the kind of stability and balance required for those who serve the church in ministry.

All four of the clergy mentioned that they chose their church from among many options. They had entered the search process and had offers from a variety of places. One of the four had actually grown up in another part of the country and came to the St. Louis area when another white pastor who had served on a committee with this pastor asked that they come and serve on staff with him. It was this personal invitation from a white friend that brought this clergy person to the conference.

One of the four had suffered a serious brain aneurism, and had taken almost eight years to fully recover from that. He is prone to seizures and must often have members of his church drive him from location to location, to and from the office, and on visitations. In spite of his compromised abilities, his obvious disability, and the extra burden on his members, this white pastor had no difficulty finding a white church in the conference.

Every one of the pastors is a good person, a respected member of the clergy, and has done a very good job serving their respective churches. The author does not mean to suggest otherwise. But he wants to point out that in spite of what they told him in their interviews about some of their admitted vulnerabilities, not one of them had any difficulty at any time getting a call that appealed to them. They were all the focus of more than one search committee, and had the kind of flexibility to move when they want, where they want.

This would not be the case unless they were white. Black candidates have no history of successful placement in the white churches of the conference, regardless of their many abilities, talents, and obvious gifts. The author is sure that a black candidate with a history of seizures who had to be driven around by his members; or one with a known history of depression; or one who had attempted suicide before would not be hired. Those events alone would surely have been cited by white search committees as reason enough for not hiring them.

The author would like to share two more experiences. One time he was approached by another conference staff member who had a close white clergy friend go through a suspension for sexual misconduct. His friend had completed his suspension, and the author was asked to try and locate a church for him. He knew this would not be

an easy task, but he also knew this person deserved another chance. He worked long and hard with a church that indicated it would be interested, and over much time and after a long, concerted effort, was able to place this minister – who continues to do good work with a church that is very happy they took the chance on him.

White churches in the MMSUCC are willing to take chances with white pastors who have been suspended for sexual misconduct.

Another white pastor had been chosen to serve as our conference youth director. He was on staff when the author came to the position he currently holds on conference staff.

This person had served three churches previously in the conference. One of them was a new church start which failed shortly after he took it over. There were rumors even then that he was a very conservative pastor (not in itself a problem – the conference is full of churches with very conservative members) who had begun to speak about the UCC in some not very flattering tones. It was believed that he equated liberal with evil. He took a second church in the conference after he effectively closed the new church start. He served that church for about two years before he left in a cloud of controversy. The rumors about his disaffection with the denomination in which he was serving only grew in intensity when shortly after he left the church took a vote to leave the UCC. The vote did not pass, but it split the church and many members left. It remains a high-maintenance church for the conference to this day.

This white clergy person was called to a third church. What was once only rumor is now known to be true about him. This third church just this last fall, after he served there for three years (and then resigned) voted to leave the UCC. An investigation which

led to his termination of standing uncovered the truth about him: he had orchestrated the take over of that third church and, after he resigned he told members of that church that if they could get the church to vote to leave, he would come back and serve there again as its pastor.

Why tell this story? Not just because this young, white male pastor who shut down one church, left another in turmoil, and led a third out of the denomination kept getting called to any church to which he applied. It is worse than that. The public reason he gave for resigning his last position was so he could give more time and attention to his real passion: working as the youth director for the Conference. He had been hired by the very conference that for almost eight years he had been working to undermine. At a recent Association Council meeting, it was pointed out by one of the pastors that if this young man were not white, he would never have been considered for any of the positions he had received, and that it was high time the conference came face to face with its love of the white pastor.

Indeed.

Questions four and five: What causes you anxiety? What gives you hope?

What prompted these questions was as much curiosity as research. And yet, the author is aware from much of the reading that he has done that this can often be the very place where white worlds and black worlds diverge. There are a host of very real and very tangible fears that blacks live with every day that never occur to white people to even think about. This might include getting pulled over by a white cop; whether or not their child will fall prey to the drug dealer in the school hallway; a prison industry that

feeds off of black males; finding a job. It would be very surprising to hear any of the white clergy talk about any of these matters.

But the author also wanted to find out if, in their responses, there would be any thoughts about race. Would there be any reference to fears of people of other races? Would there be any stated hope for racial harmony, justice, or equality? How would white clergy respond to a very open-ended question like this in the context of a study that was being conducted on them about the role of white clergy as it relates to white power, privilege, and supremacy?

It was intentionally placed it at the end of the interview. Had it been the first question asked after being told that they were being interviewed for a Doctoral Research project about reframing the dialogue on racism, the author does not doubt that their responses would have focused on the issue of race. But coming at the very end of a rather lengthy interview that enticed them in a non-threatening way simply to tell their story, and coming as a bit of a non-sequitor, the author wanted to find out if by this time the issue of race had or had not been left behind.

The short answer to that question is that it indeed had left the conversation. Not one of the participants gave an answer that in any way referred even obliquely to race. This suggests two things: these white clergy are not anxious about matters of race; and their hopes do not primarily include a vision of racial equality or justice. The latter seems astounding, given the context. In an interview for research about white power, privilege, and supremacy – which each interviewee was told about – four clergy all fail to name racial equality as one of their hopes.

What they did talk about seemed fairly reasonable. There were concerns about coping with potential health problems of children and the possible pain of burying one of them; there were anxieties about a growing congregation not coping with the changes that such growth would always bring, and that the “clubs” that had always run the church before would continue to exist and hamper further growth.

As a follow up to this question, the author asked the clergy in question to describe the clubs, setting the clergy up to respond in a way that would indicate that race determined the composition of all of those clubs: this did not happen. The response was only that power was in the hands of a few families who lacked hospitality. This was the same pastor who had earlier talked about having to leave an all white church when they learned he had invited a black friend over to dinner.

There were hopes that one will discover a thread of ministry for which this clergy person would not have the appropriate gifts; that after 24 or 25 years it would be discovered that this clergy would have had no influence nor made any difference.

Hopes that were spoken of included a sense of security that comes from knowing that when all is said and done, God is God. One told a very poignant story about a dream that was had years ago when the threat of nuclear war was imminent: in the dream, plumes of nuclear disaster were everywhere and there was this overwhelming sense that all life had been wiped out. In the dream this person simply lay face down in the dust and heard the words repeated “ashes to ashes, dust to dust” and from this received an overwhelming sense that no matter what, God was in control.

Hope was shared that the church now being served by this clergy would continue to grow and adjust to all that this required of a growing church (this church, it was

pointed out, had just hired an associate for youth and young families in what was characterized as ‘the most adult-oriented church this pastor had ever seen’); a hope that the church would continue to serve the whole community. It was wondered if this wasn’t a veiled reference to including people of another race, so it was asked what was meant by “the whole community.” A story was told to explain this about an elderly woman who had come to this pastor and said: “Do you know what they are saying about our church? That we are the church that lets anyone take communion, and isn’t that wonderful!” There was no reference to race here in the response offered.

Hope was shared that the church being served would break out of a generation’s worth of feeling low self-esteem, that they would regain a sense of being Christian and a sense of being something strong; that the family of this person would simply know Christ.

There were no direct references to anxieties or hopes related to matters of race. It could be argued that the pastor who talked about the hope the church would come to represent the whole community meant to include in that welcome people of other races, but this was said.

It is the purview and privilege of white communities not to ever think about matters of race. These clergy reflect that privilege. Race did not appear on the sweep of a radar scan sent to detect where fear and hope lie. These clergy participated in the earlier part of the study that showed that 98% of them knew and believed that race was a problem. While they can and will acknowledge this, there is as yet no sign that this problem presents them with any recognized anxiety or inspires within them any real hope for its resolution. It becomes the hope of this project that over time, studies like these can

hold, as it were, a mirror before their eyes and allow them to see themselves in a different light.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS

This project began with an assumption: it is not possible to be white in America today and not be the beneficiary of white skin privilege. It was the purpose of this study to discover the extent to which the white clergy of the Missouri Mid-South Conference of the United Church of Christ were recipients of white privilege, white power, and white supremacy; the extent to which they were aware of that; and the difference that any of this demonstrated awareness might make in this group and the churches they serve. Let us examine each of those questions in order based on the findings of our research.

Do the white clergy of the Missouri Mid-South Conference of the United Church of Christ benefit from white skin privilege?

Yes.

Each piece of the research demonstrated this. White churches have expressed a desire to hire only white pastors. Of the membership of this conference, 97% is white. All but two reporting churches have a 90% or higher white membership. All but eight of the reporting churches have 100% white governing boards, and only two of those eight have more than one non-white person on the board. Of the white pastors surveyed, 82% indicated that many of the advantages they have come to them because they are white.

And while every newsletter portrays white skin, only 18 of 1,375 portrayals of skin in the 100 newsletters showed black skin.

Of the books on the pastors shelves, 93% are by white authors, while 100% of the names given of influential theologians and biblical scholars by those interviewed were white.

On average, the churches served by white clergy have .17 pictures of a black Jesus. This is true even though we have long known that Jesus could not have been white.

Pastors who are white can suffer diagnosable depression and still find a church that will call them. Pastors who are white can recover from a suspension for sexual misconduct and find a church that will call them. Pastors who are white can suffer from a brain aneurism that results in periodic seizures and force members of the church to drive them from one location to another and find a church that will call them. Pastors who are white can have the luxury of sending their profile to one church and not worry about whether or not they will receive a call. Pastors who are white can get invitations from former friends to come and work on their staff with them, giving them an inside track to some of the open pulpits. Pastors who are white can receive direct calls and invitations from conference leadership to fill vacancies. Pastors who are white can serve a string of unsuccessful pastorates amid rumors that they are mobilizing their membership to leave the denomination and not only continue to receive calls, the very same white pastor can even be invited to serve on conference staff.

History demonstrates that this was never possible for black ministers. On the contrary, many search committees communicate that they will not, under any circumstances, call a black pastor. Conference staff in the past have told black ministers

that their field of inquiry would be limited to inner city churches abandoned by white families that have moved to the suburbs and left the church all but empty, or to any of the very few predominantly black congregations in the Conference.

It has been demonstrated that white skin privilege accounts for access to the pulpits of white churches that have been reserved for white ministers.

Are the white clergy of the Conference aware of their white skin privilege?

This is a more difficult answer to speak definitively about. There are indications throughout the study that at least some level of awareness about white skin privilege, white power, and white supremacy exists.

The data suggests that:

- 86% of the white pastors agreed that whites receive a better education than blacks.
- 80% agreed that white police are more inclined to pull over a black man than a white man.
- 56% agreed (just a little over half , and exactly twice as many as those who disagreed) that history texts written by whites show a clear racial bias.
- 84% believe that a white is more apt to succeed in America today, while 94% believe that whites are not any more intelligent than blacks.
- 93% admit that since the time of the civil rights movement, no level playing field has been created between the black and the white races.

All of this suggests that there is some level of awareness of white skin privilege amongst the white clergy of the MMSUCC.

But in the 100 newsletters collected from white churches served by white pastors, not one pastor chose to write about the issue of race. What does that reveal about a group: that 98% of them agree in the survey that race is a problem, but not one chooses to write about the subject?

In the over 2,000 articles found in those same newsletters, only two articles appeared that focused on race, and only another eight even mentioned race in a very peripheral way. One of those was a prayer to end racism, the other was a poem about racism. What does that reveal about the same group?

The average pastor confirms 1.4 blacks over an entire career in ministry, and baptizes 1.3 over the same career. Almost half of all pastors cannot even answer the question of whether or not their church uses any vendors from black-owned businesses. Almost 1/3 of them have no picture in their office in which a person of color appears. And all but three of the 70 who participated in the survey admitted that they never think about their race. Not one of the clergy interviewed could identify their race as a qualifying characteristic when asked to describe themselves. Those same clergy could name neither an anxiety nor a hope related to matters of race. What does this reveal about these clergy and their awareness of white skin privilege.

I think that at one level, there truly is an awareness among the clergy that there are benefits to being white in this culture. I do not think that in the end this awareness reaches any real deep consciousness, either in the individual or in the collective bodies.

It is almost as if it were something read about in an article somewhere that merited a nod of the head and perhaps some reflective, thoughtful analysis—but certainly not any life changing remedies.

Which brings us to our final question.

Does the awareness of white skin privilege among the clergy of the MMSUCC produce any tangible, meaningful results?

No.

To their credit, it was revealed that on average white clergy in the MMSUCC preach almost three times a year on the issue of race (2.8 to be exact). A closer look reveals that this is a bit deceiving, though. 13 of the 58 who answered this question never once preached about race in the last year, and one pastor shot the average way up by saying he or she preached about race 26 times last year and another did the same saying he or she preached about race 20 times.

Beyond this, there is almost no evidence that whatever awareness these clergy may have about white skin privilege produces any real results.

Both of the black clergy who serve white churches are from other cultures, one from West Africa and the other from Jamaica.

We have already talked about a 97% white membership; about 1.4 blacks confirmed over the average lifespan and 1.3 baptized; about not one article by a white clergy person written about race; about the paucity of black skin portrayals in the newsletters. The data strongly suggests that it still matters that a clergy is white when pulpits come open and that the white clergy never think about what race they are.

In his article titled “Theology’s Great Sin: Silence in the Face of White Supremacy”, James Cone argues that there are four reasons why white clergy, white Christians, and white theologians never talk about race.

The first reason is they don’t have to. As long as the culture affords them the luxury of white skin privilege, there is no real reason for them to speak. Something other than need must motivate them, because the culture itself provides them with enough – even if it comes at the expense of someone else. Knowledge about this injustice, as we have tried to demonstrate, is not sufficient motivation to speak out about this evil.

The second reason they do not speak about this is the overwhelming fear of guilt. Cone suggests there is a sense of collective guilt that cannot permit any open and honest discussion about the matter of race. This guilt is paralyzing.

Third, Cone argues that whites cannot allow the truth to be spoken about white supremacy because they are afraid of black rage. There is a growing awareness that if the real truth were ever spoken aloud, the collective and growing sense of injustice would have to cry out for blood. That blood would be shed by every white at the hand of an enraged black body – or so the fantasy goes. Fearing this, the white church begs for silence about these matters.

Fourth, and finally, Cone realizes that the white church remains silent because it does not want to lose its power and wealth. White skin privilege just gives us too much to which we have grown accustomed, and which we take for granted. We cannot stomach the thought of letting any of this go.

The author believes that Cone is right. He believes Cone is justified in arguing that whites must insist on an end to this silence. The author believes that in the end, the

white clergy of the Missouri Mid-South Conference say nothing and do nothing about race for precisely the reasons Cone cites. While the reasons for their silence cannot be supported by the study here, he does think that he has successfully demonstrated that the white clergy of my conference benefit from white privilege, white power, and white supremacy; that while they may be somewhat aware of that, they remain remarkably silent about it and unwilling to effect any meaningful changes. It is his fervent hope that this study will serve to awaken the voices of these colleagues of his and inspire them to speak. His hope is that it will reveal the unwelcome truth about whites in the church, and invite them to see themselves not as they want to be, but as they are.

Whether whites have to or not; whether afraid of the guilt they can, they will, and they must confront; whether what comes is a rage that is certainly warranted or a peace and a grace like that Nelson Mandela offered to his own captors; and whether whites lose a power and a wealth that betrays in the end which master they have chosen to serve: they must speak. Whites must confront their demons. They must engage in a struggle for a peace that might cost them their privilege, but which will in the end heal their wounds and the wounds of their ancestors.

This completes the study. One is tempted to ask, "Why?" Why go to these lengths to find out whether or not the white clergy are invested in systems of white power, privilege, and supremacy? Howard Thurman writes:

Overt power is in the hands of white society. Well within its territory reside the controls. For a long time the yea and the nay have been words belonging uniquely to the vocabulary of white society. But it must be remembered that the old saw that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely remains true.¹

¹ Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness* (Richmond, VA: Friends United Press, 1989), 78.

The white church is a powerful institution. In some places its power is absolute. If that power were to give itself to the cause of justice, the kind of transformation and revolution called for in these days could and would occur. What prevents that, and what ends up buying the silence of the white clergy, is their investment in a system of white skin privilege that affords them opportunities, power, and supremacy to which they have grown accustomed, and from which they are loathe to be freed.

Thurman is right: overt power is in their hands. One might argue that what this study reveals may well also be true in the black church: they won't hire white ministers; their memberships are just as monocultural; they don't baptize white people, etc. That is entirely beside the point. The larger picture reveals that both churches exist within a culture that invests itself heavily in white skin privilege. The question is not about which churches or which cultures are more exclusive, but which hold power. And what do they do with that power? And who is served by that power? And, perhaps most importantly, is the use of that power intended to give glory to God?

Overt power is in the hands of the white church, and in the hands of the white clergy. If they cannot divest themselves of the ill-gotten privilege afforded them by the corrupted power of the white society in which they live, then justice will be delayed for yet another generation. How many W. E. B. Dubois will have to wake up at the dawn of a new century and declare that the greatest problem facing them in their time is the problem of the color line?

White clergy serving all white churches who refuse to address the problem of the color line and who remain silent in the face of white supremacy do not serve well the cause of justice and equality for all. Living with a false presumption of their liberal own

causes and agendas in this matter does not help. This study was designed to answer important questions. The author believes it did that.

It prompts the more important question: what now do whites (for the author is a white clergy person in an almost all white church) do with what whites know to be true. This study, as was written earlier, is intended to be nothing more than a first step in a journey of a thousand miles.

APPENDIX A

PART I: SURVEY SENT TO WHITE CLERGY OF MMSUCC

1. I believe that race is a problem in America today.
2. I believe that whites are, by and large, more intelligent than blacks.
3. I believe that whites receive a better education than blacks.
4. I believe that white police are more inclined to pull over a black man than a white man.
5. I would be comfortable with my white daughter dating a black man.
6. I would be comfortable with my white son dating a black woman.
7. I believe that affirmative action policies discriminate against able white people.
8. I feel that the death penalty is fairly administered to people of all races.
9. There is less racial tension today than in the past.
10. Since the time of the civil rights movement, a level playing field has been created between the black and the white races.
11. I believe that reparations should be made by whites today to blacks.
12. Slavery is an evil of the past, and the burden of its resolve should not be placed on today's whites.
13. I think whites should become more involved in socializing with blacks.
14. I hardly ever think about what race I am.
15. I am a beneficiary of white privilege.
16. White people have bent over backwards trying to make up for their ancestors' treatment of blacks, and now it is time to stop.
17. Society may have been unjust to blacks, but it has also been unjust to whites.
18. I believe that white people look and express themselves better than blacks.
19. I feel as comfortable around blacks as I do whites.

20. I do not feel as if I have the social skill to interact effectively with blacks.
21. A black is as apt to succeed in America today as whites.
22. Sometimes I am not sure what I think about blacks.
23. I get angry when I think about how whites have been treated by blacks.
24. I feel depressed after I have been around blacks.
25. Blacks and whites can have successful, intimate relationships.
26. I feel more comfortable with a white doctor.
27. I would rather have a white judge in court than a black judge.
28. I prefer to be white in this culture rather than black.
29. It matters what race a person is when writing the history texts for our children.
30. History texts written by whites show a clear racial bias.
31. Many of the advantages that I have come to me because I am white.

APPENDIX B

PART II: SURVEY SENT TO WHITE CLERGY OF MMSUCC

1. About ____% of the books in my office are by black authors.
2. Of the pictures in my office, ____ have faces of people of color.
3. Of the pictures of Jesus that hang in my church, ____ portray Jesus as white, and ____ portray him as black.
4. ____ out of the ____ people that my church employ are black.
5. My church uses ____ vendors of black owned businesses.
6. ____ times a day, on average, I make a remark to someone about my race.
7. My church office is closed on Martin Luther King, Jr. day. y / n
8. The membership of my church is ____% white and ____% black.
9. In my years of ministry, I have confirmed ____ black children.
10. In my years of ministry, I have baptized ____ black Christians.
11. The council of my church is ____% white, and ____% black.
12. I am aware of ____ members of my church who marched in the Civil Rights movement.
13. In the past year, I have preached about the issue of racial justice ____ times.
14. In the past year, I have spoken about white supremacy and white privilege ____ times.
15. In the past year, I have called on ____ black families as prospective members of my church.
16. In the past year, I have called on ____ white families as prospective members of my church.

APPENDIX C

COVER LETTER FOR SURVEY SENT TO WHITE CLERGY OF MMSUCC

Dear Colleagues in Ministry:

I am asking you to do me a huge favor.

I am in the midst of my Doctoral Studies. The topic for which I hope soon to acquire my D. Min. is "Reframing the Dialogue on Racism." Please feel free to call me if you have any questions about that.

One of the things we are examining is our own complicity in the systems of white privilege and white power. We are trying to become aware not just of the ways in which being white affects how we see the world and the world see us, but also the ways in which being white affords us opportunities; and even then the extent to which this happens without our being aware of it.

One of the tools we have come across in our research is the White Racial Inventory and Attitude Survey (WRIAS). I have used this in other contexts, and found it to be helpful. My classmates and I have amended that a bit to fit our purposes here. As I progress with my research, I am asking you if you would be so kind as to take the few minutes necessary to fill out this survey and send back to me the completed form. I would be ever so grateful.

Do not hesitate to call me with any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

John C. Dorhauer

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